



A LONG COMPLETE STORY OF SEXTON BLAKE INSIDE.

No. 379—May 25th, 1940.



The man in the boat started to his feet, grasping the oar in his hands and raising it above his head. The small craft rocked dangerously, and the man let out a sudden yell of terror. Faint in the starlight, the dark shape of a monstrous head appeared from the boil of water, and plunged towards the rowing-boat.

# The SECRET OF THE LOCH

## The Monster of the Deep

THE loch stretched away towards the west, its surface still and shimmering faintly silver under the starlight. Around it the rocky peaks of the highland hills rose like jagged ramparts into the velvet sky.

There was one moving thing upon the lake; a boat, rowing slowly across from one shore to the other, two miles away. It looked as tiny as a water beetle, slowly skimming the surface, leav-

ing behind faint, circular ripples where the oars had dipped.

A solitary man was in the boat, rowing with a slow and measured rhythm. His back was towards the north shore as he bent to the oars, his face towards the small, shadowy shape of an ancient inn on the south shore.

No light showed anywhere. In the far distance sounded the faint hum of a patrolling aircraft, circling off hawiness, alert for the black spread wings of a night raider.

The hum died, and left only the dull plashing

of the oars in the water. Suddenly even this sound stopped.

The rower jerked his head and looked over his shoulder. He frowned anxiously over the water, as if he expected to see something there, but the surface was like a mirror.

The boat drifted, and the man let one oar swing free in the rowlock, and grasped the other with his two hands. His eyes jerked continually over the water, and then suddenly he saw it.

A plume of white foam appeared on the sur-

face, which spread like lightning to a boiling circle of white, as if some giant of the deep was turning its head of the water attempt to strike at the unknown horror with the oar, but the boat rocked too violently. He struck, but the blow tipped the boat over towards the monster.

With a short scream, the man fell headlong into the water a yard from the monstrous head. The man vanished, and the monster dived back again into the deep.

A minute passed, and the foam on the water faded and died away. The face of the lake became placid, with only the upturned boat and two oars drifting helplessly on the water.

The monster's victim did not rise to the surface again. His short death scream had echoed over the lake and died, leaving the silence of the still night.

### Strangers at the Inn

THE parlour of the inn on the south shore of the lake was quiet. There were the sounds of a clock ticking, and a girl humming softly as she polished some glasses behind the counter. Save for her, the room was empty.

She looked up as heavy boots came clumping down the stairs outside the parlour, and approached the door.

The door opened, and a thin, bent fellow shuffled in, looking at his walrus moustache with his tongue. He wore a shiny pair of trousers, a waistcoat, and a shirt, with no collar. His eyes were bright and curious as he shuffled towards the counter.

"Accidents," he said, in a mumbling sort of voice. "Nothing but accidents these days. I tell ye, Lucy, there's a curse around this place. Things is going bad to worse."

The girl shuddered slightly.

"Ah, stop that silly talk, Tom!" she said impatiently. "You give me the jitters. I never heard anybody talk the way you do these days. Anybody'd think the place was haunted—"

"Ay! And maybe it ain't far from being haunted, either," said the potman, nodding, and shutting one eye. "Everything goes wrong don't it? These two gents what just arrived. Why are they here, eh? Cause they smashed their car up on the shore road."

The girl hesitated. In the silence the clock ticked loudly.

"Well, it's business for us, isn't it?" she snapped. "Nobody was hurt, and we've got two customers. We can do with 'em, too."

"Ain't that just what I was saying?" demanded Tom, frowning. "We don't get no customers now, do we? Why, eh? There must be a reason why customers suddenly stop coming."

"It's because there's a war on, stupid!"

"Ah!" Tom nodded again and closed one eye. "That's what they all do—blame it on the war. But I know it ain't the war. It's something else. Something I've seen with my own eyes—something in the lake! Yes, everybody says old Tom's a fool, but I see things in that lake—"

"Will you stop that silly talk?" snapped the girl angrily. "It fair gives me the creeps. Anybody'd think there was Dracula walking up and down the shore all night!"

"Dracula don't walk, girl," said Tom airily. "They're a disease. I had a cousin died of it—or was it—anyways it was something that ticked, and he scratched himself to death—"

The potman broke off, and both he and the girl turned at their heads towards the cellar steps behind the counter. From the cellar below came the sound of a throaty voice swearing.

The two looked at each other as they recognized the voice of Lorn, the landlord.

"On the booze again, is he?" said Tom slowly.

"Night after night he's on it. Why?" He tapped on the counter with his finger, and lowered his voice. "Because he's afraid!"

The girl's eyes widened, and she showed clearly the fear that was in her mind. Tom reached the sight, and licked his moustache again.

"That's what he is," he whispered blood-thirstily. "scared!"

Heavy feet came tramping up the steep cellar steps, and a big, red-faced man clambered up into the parlour. His eyes were shifty and quick, as if he was continually expecting to see something hiding in the shadowy corners of the room.

He carried a bottle in his hand, and he thumped it on to the counter and stood panting heavily, trying to get his breath back.

"Damnation take it!" he snorted. "What are you two standing doing nothing for?"

"There ain't nothing to do," muttered Tom. "Nothing to do?" snorted Lorn. "Is Mr. Gordon's supper ready? No! I bet it isn't."

"Well, it is," said Tom. "Bin ready an hour or two."

The landlord flushed redder than before, and turned away.

"Well, if you remembered to do that, I bet you've forgotten something else," he said surlily, and turned back to Tom again. "Where's then, two gents who smashed the car?"

"Gone to bed," said Tom, brushing his moustache with his finger.

"Huh!" snorted Lorn. "I'd be better pleased to see 'em filling their bellies and my till. We need some business, goodness knows. All we've got is Mr. Jamieson, who spends a bit of money. Gordon does nothing but snore around, like he was trying to smell out something."

All three of them looked up with violent starts.



LORN, THE LANDLORD

"... On the booze again, is he? Night after night he's on it. Why? Because he's afraid!"

as the parlour door shut suddenly. A tall man in a black coat and hat had come silently in and now crossed to the counter as quietly as a cat.

"Ah, Mr. Gordon!" cried the landlord, flushing like a beetroot. "We were just talking about you—"

"I heard you," answered Gordon smoothly. "I'm interested listening."

Lorn blew his nose like a trumpet to cover his confusion, but Gordon seemed ready to ignore the thing he had heard about himself. He laid his walking-stick on the counter.

"There's a smashed-up car outside. I see," he said, raising his eyebrows at Lorn. "Nobody hurt, I hope?" He spoke in a soft voice, like a purr.

"No, nobody hurt," said Lorn, somewhat relieved that Gordon had not taken offence at what he had heard. "The two gents in it have gone up to bed."

Gordon leant on the counter and stared curiously at the fat landlord.

"So we have company to-night, eh?" he said slowly.

He glanced up at the oak-beamed ceiling as if he would like to see through it to the bedrooms above.

"What are they?"

Lorn whirled on the silent potman: "What's their names, Tom?"

"I dunno," said Tom, shaking his head. "I don't know their names, and I don't."

"Oh, yes! The tall one's name's Blake," said Lorn, seeing it on a case he got with him.

Gordon became still, and his eyes narrowed. "Blake?" he said, suddenly sharp. "Any idea who he is, Tom?"

He shrugged and looked careless again. "Not that it matters," he went on airily. "But you'll have to be careful, Lorn. This is wartime, and the authorities are strict about having the visitors' book signed."

"Damn it!" roared Lorn, and turned on Tom again. "You half-wit! Why didn't you make 'em sign the book?"

"Because I was carrying up their cases, and getting Mr. Gordon's supper, and shifting them bottles, like you told me, and cleaning down the kitchen floor, and—"

Tom stopped his list of achievements as Lorn grabbed his shoulder.

"Take them down now!" he shouted.

"But they gone to bed!" protested Tom.

"I don't care if they've gone to the devil!" snarled Lorn. "Take it up."

Tom shrugged as if to show that it would not be his fault if the new visitors made trouble about this, and left the parlour. He lifted the big visitors' book from a small table in the hall, and began to shuffle up the stairs, muttering as he went.

"Take it up, Tom. Take it down, Tom. Damn you, Tom! It's nothing but cursing and bawling all day and night now. He's frightened, that's what. But he don't know what he's frightened of. But I do. I know. I see it!"

He stopped and stared at the old oak wall, as if he would scare the thing out of it.

"They're scared, ain't they? They jump at a creek. They're afraid to look out at the lake, 'cause of what they might see!"

He rubbed his moustache with his finger, then shuffled on up the stairs and along the passage to the door of the room where he had shown the tall Mr. Blake an hour before.

He knocked, and a sleepy voice answered from inside.

"Who the deuce is that?"

"It's Tom!" the potman shouted at the top of his voice.

"Well, come in," the tired voice invited.

Tom opened the door and entered the dark room, which was lit by the faint glow of the electric light which came through the window.

He saw the tall man sit up in the bed and stare like a grey ghost in the shadows.

"Why, it's dark!" said Tom, halting.

"That's because the light isn't on," answered the tall man with a yawn. "I have the windows open, and the law of the black-out forbids lights showing at open windows. Well, what do you want?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Tom, suddenly remembering what he had come for. "Sir, you forgot to sign the book."

"Well, of all the men!" snorted the man in the bed. "Do you mean you've woken me up for that?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom blankly. "It's the law."

The law he handed, snarped Blake, lying down in the bed again. "Listen, Tom. I was just starting the first real sleep I've had for three days, and I am not going to shut the windows, and the law is against it, and you undo the whole lot again, to sign your confounded book! Now take it away. I'll sign it in the morning."

Blake seemed to go to sleep again, but Tom stood still, nodding knowingly.

"Yes, sir," he said. "But the book. It's important we not to know who you are, it seems. Mr. Lorn says so."

"My name is Blake," said the sleepy man wearily. "Sexton Blake. Now be a good fellow and go."

"Sexton Blake!" cried Tom, awestruck. "The detective?"

The door opened again, and a touse-headed figure appeared in a dressing-gown.

"Blake's going on, guv'nor?" demanded the new-comer.

Sexton Blake sat up again. It was not often he showed signs of irritation. But it was a long time since he had any rest.

"Listen, Tinker. Take this well-meaning fellow with the book out of this room, and sign him, or his book, or whatever it is he wants signed."

"Sexton Blake!" whispered Tom again, as the detective once more lay down in the hope of being allowed to go to sleep.

"Leave the book till the morning," said Tinker, catching Tom's suddenness, and added:

But Tom suddenly came to his senses, jerked his arm out of Tinker's hand, and grabbed

Blake's shoulder and began to shake it violently. "Mr. Blake!" he gasped. "Was that a real accident you had?"

"Real accident?" echoed Tinker. "What's the fellow talking about now?"

"I don't know," said the detective shortly. "And I wish he wouldn't. Take him away!"

"I mean—did you come here on purpose?" demanded Tom, and there was such distinct anxiety in his voice and manner that Blake opened his eyes and stared up at the grey, eager face.

"What made you say that?" Blake asked quietly, and sat up once more.

Tom hesitated, and began to fiddle nervously with the book under his arm.

"Well," he said uneasily, "maybe I didn't ought to have said it but there's—there's things."

He paused again. Blake glanced at the shadowy face of Tinker, and in the dim light it seemed as if a meaning look passed between them.

"If there are things," said Blake, "tell us what things they are."

Tom immediately began to pour out words as if he was afraid he would be kicked out of the room before he had time to find what he had come to say.

"Mr. Blake!" he gasped. "There's some thing's been happening. Since the night there's something in the loch, Mr. Blake! Something bad. It's put a curse on the place. People are afraid to come here any more."

"In the loch?" echoed Blake, and glanced at Tinker again.

Tinker chuckled suddenly.

"It can't be the old story of the monster again, can it?" he said.

Tom spun round to him, and went on at a breakneck pace.

"Yes, sir. You can laugh! They all laugh at me. They all think I'm a fool, sir, and I ain't got much brains, I know—but I'm not crazy, sir, and I don't make up the things I see."

"I don't care if you laugh, and you can call me a fool, too, but there is something in the loch, sir, and I tell you it!" he hesitated, his breath heaving in his throat with excitement—"It eats men!"

Blake started.

"What?"

"Yes, sir! I seen it. Seen it with my own eyes. Last week I was sitting on the shore, sir, like I sometimes do, and I see a man walking along the shore some distance from me."

"What?" prompted Blake. "What happened then?"

"And suddenly this thing came up out of the water, and—well, it looked like it swallowed him. He vanished, sir—went like a ghost!"

"There was silence, and only Tom's panting breath could be heard."

"Orkney! That sounds a bit steep!" said Tinker in amazement.

"He sounds scared enough to be telling the truth," Blake commented quietly. "What did this thing look like?"

"Well, I was too far away, sir, and it was dark, too, and Tom, staring uneasily about him."

"And it looked like..."

He became still, his eyes fixed upon something he could see through the open window.

"I recovered myself with a gasp of horror, and pointed suddenly."

"Look! There—through the window!" he cried. "It's another—"

Tinker darted to the window. Blake flung the clothes off his bed and followed his assistant. They stared out over the mirror-like surface of the lake, scattered with the reflection of the stars.

"It's an overturned boat," said Tinker.

Blake made no answer. He did not seem to be staring at the overturned boat which drifted silently on the lake. He was staring at something closer inshore.

"I see that, Tinker," he said at last. "And also what looks like a dead man, lying in the shallow water on the shore-look!"

"You're right, guv'nor!" breathed Tinker, after a second.

"Get a coat on—quick!" snapped Blake, turning from the window to grope for his own coat.

"I told you—I told you!" panted Tom, half in triumph and half in terror. "They wouldn't listen to me, because they was afraid. They're scared! All scared, and that's why they won't talk about it!"

"Listen, Tom," said Blake, returning to the



Blake stared out of the window and saw what looked like the body of a dead man lying in the shallow water. Suddenly old Tom caught hold of him and pointed at something streaking across the loch. "There it is!" he cried. "There's the—there's the thing that eats men!"

window as he struggled into his coat. "There's no proof yet that your monster exists. This drowned man might have had an ordinary accident."

He stopped, and stared out over the lake again. A thin white feather of foam appeared and began to run across the surface of the water.

The feather suddenly broke into a big, whirling pool of foam, and from the middle of it appeared what looked like a monstrous black head.

It stayed showing above the surface for a brief instant, then dived and was gone. The foam faded and died away, leaving the lake like a mirror again.

"There you are!" gasped Tom. "It's true—like I said it was! Oh, I'm glad you've seen it! The others didn't believe me. They called me a fool, but I know."

Tinker came hurrying back into the room, doing up his overcoat. Blake bent to struggle into a pair of shoes.

"How often have you seen this thing before?" demanded the detective.

"Three or four times, Mr. Blake," answered Tom. "My eyes were—" "Twice I seen it just appear—like you saw it then—and it dived down again, because there wasn't nothing on the lake for it to—"

Tinker stepped forward, frowning incredulously.

"Do you mean you've actually seen the thing, guv'nor?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes, Tinker. A moment ago. There's something there all right!" snapped Blake, and straightened himself. "Ready? Listen, Tom. You hang about till we come back. I want to have a chat with you."

Blake looked up suddenly as a man appeared in the doorway and marched in, whistling. He stopped and became silent as he saw the three occupants of the room, then gazed about him.

"Sorry, people!" he said cheerfully. "I've mistaken my room. Always getting mixed up with these confounded doors!"

He looked back through the doorway and began to wander out again, his hands in his trousers pockets.

"One, two, three," he counted, halting in the doorway. "Ah, yes—there it is!" He looked back at the others. "I say, you all look jolly serious. What's happened? Ceiling fallen down?"

"There's a dead man on the shore," answered Blake, striding towards the door.

"I say!" exclaimed the stranger, with sudden interest. "Sure he's dead?"

"I'm afraid so," Blake said, passing him. "Get our shoes, Tinker. They're in your case."

Tinker darted into his own room, and Blake hesitated at the stairhead. A moment later the young assistant returned, his face grim.

"The guns have gone, guv'nor!" he said urgently.

Blake narrowed his eyes, and his jaw set hard.

"Really!" he said tersely. "Things are beginning to happen sooner than I expected. Come on—down to the shore!"

The two hurried away down the stairs, watched by the stranger on the stairs. He watched them go out by the main door of the inn, then wandered away down the passage, whistling. He stopped outside the door of his own room, then looked round as Tom shuffled by and clapped his way down the stairs.

The stranger stroked his jaw, then walked down the stairs and into the parlour, where Gordon and Lorn were still talking together.

Tom began to dust the shelves behind the counter, and seemed determined to keep silent about what he had seen on the loch.

"After all," he thought, "they'll only call me a fool again. And now Mr. Blake knows I ain't a fool!"

"Ah, Mr. Jameson!" said Gordon to the stranger. "Changed your mind about going to bed?"

The young man stopped whistling and wandered up to the bar, as if he had nothing in the world to worry about.

"Those fellows rushed out as if they had been burnt," he said lightly. "So, naturally, I decided to come down and wait to see if the fellow really is dead."

"Dead?" echoed Lorn, with a violent start. "What are you talking about, sir?"

His face went grey.

"This chap upstairs has just seen a dead man on the shore," answered Jameson. "And that's why he's rushed out in a hurry, taking the young fellow with him."

Luce, the barmaid, became still, and her cheeks went so white she looked as if she would faint. Lorn took a gulp at his drink as if to steady himself.

"Who are the two men?" snapped Gordon.

"Why have they gone out without saying anything to us?"

"Because they're detectives!" broke in Tom, his eyes gleaming. "That tall man's Sexton Blake!"

A dead silence fell. Gordon became motionless, then darted across to the window and lifted the curtain aside to look out.

"Drop that curtain!" shouted Lorn. "You're showing a light!"

Gordon let the curtain fall back into place and turned back to the others.

"They're on the shore," he said, in a cracked voice. "They seem to have found something."

Tom looked eagerly across at Gordon, then turned and went clumping down the steps into the cellar. Luce gave a shudder.

"Ooo! I'm glad we've got a detective here!" she gasped.

"Shut up—and put that glass down before



you drop it!" snarled Lorn, turning on her like a fury.

"My word! You seem to be rattled, Lorn," said Jamieson, with a grin. "Got some guilty secrets Blake might find out?"

A silence fell, and the clock ticked loudly.

"Oh dear!" said Lucy tremulously. "I've got a sort of dithery feeling inside—sort of sick, like when something awful happens!"

"You've been listening to Tom's silly talk!" snarled Lorn. "That idiot does nothing but imagine murders and monsters—" He broke off, grabbed up his drink, and finished it at a gulp.

The silence fell again. The clock ticked slowly, hollowly, and in the silence it seemed that all four people were listening to it. The stillness of the night was uncanny.

Jamieson began to whistle softly.

"Stop!" hissed Gordon, catching his arm.

"What's that?"

Another silence; then faintly came the sound of slow footsteps approaching the inn. The four people waited tensely, their eyes on the parlour door.

The footsteps climbed the six wooden stairs to the inn door, and the door rattled open, and fell shut again. Gordon let a gasp of relief escape him.

"Two of them!" he said hoarsely.

The parlour door opened and Blake and Tinker came in, their faces grave.

"We have found a man—drowned," Blake said tonelessly.

The door fell to behind him, and Lorn started at the sound of the click.

"You had better telephone the police, Lorn. His boat capsized."

"Oh! Just an accident!" said Gordon.

Blake looked at him sharply.

"Did you expect it to be something else?" he snapped.

Gordon looked uneasily at Lorn and Jamieson.

"No, no! Of course not. What else could it be—but an accident?"

Silence fell again. The eyes of the four people were on the detective.

"My name is Sexton Blake," he said slowly.

"You may know my profession. I have reason to believe that I may be of some assistance in this matter."

"Then you don't think it's an accident?" asked Jamieson, with interest. "My name is Jamieson, by the way."

"How long have you been staying here, Mr. Jamieson?" Blake asked, bringing an empty pipe from his pocket.

"Oh, about six weeks," Jamieson answered.

"I'm having a fishing holiday."

"Caught anything in the lake?" Blake asked suddenly.

"Of course!" Jamieson laughed. "Even I stand a chance of catching something in six weeks!"

"My name is Gordon," broke in the man in black, as if eager to offer the information. "I have been here three weeks. I have business to do in Inverness, and I go there nearly every day."

"Why didn't you say in Inverness?" Blake queried.

Gordon shrugged, apparently at gain time to think of an answer.

"I preferred the quiet here," he said, with a faint grin. "I used to live near here as a boy, and I am rather fond of it."

Blake brought out a tobacco pouch and began to fill his pipe. They all watched in silence.

"The man we found had the name MacLaren on an envelope he had in his pocket," Blake said. "Do you know the name?"

"MacLaren! Yes!" cried Lorn. "He is one of the villagers from the north shore. He rows across here every night for a drink, and then goes back. Is he dead? Heavens! This is terrible!"

Lorn poured himself another drink, and his hands shook.

"If he rowed four miles every night he is not the sort of man who would overturn his boat by accident, is he?" Blake snapped.

Lorn's eyes bulged, and he glanced aside at the white-faced Lucy.

"No; that's true. Tom MacLaren would never—" Lorn seemed afraid to go on, for he changed the trend of his talk. "But accidents happen to the most skillful men," he ended lamely.

There was another pause. Blake lit his pipe, and the scratch of the match sounded loud and

harsh. He puffed at the pipe slowly, then tossed the match away.

"Have any of you noticed anything strange happening on the lake recently?" he asked slowly.

"I haven't!" burst out Lucy breathlessly, "but Tom—"

"Stop that rubbish!" shouted Lorn. "You listen too much to Tom! The man's crazy, Mr. Blake. I'll have to get rid of him. He imagines things. He's always spreading some story or the other—"

"What kind of stories?" cut in Blake.

Lorn hesitated.

"Fairy tales!" he said angrily. "He's started that old story of the Loch Ness monster again."

Jamieson laughed.

"Not very original!" he said.

"On the contrary," said Blake sharply. "Very original. I said the capsized boat did not look like an accident. MacLaren's body is badly bruised, which could not have happened merely by his falling into the water. One side of this boat is crushed in, as if it has been rammed by something large and heavy."

The frightened silence came again, and now, mixed with the slow, hollow ticking of the clock,

came another sound—a very faint, regular creaking.

"Do you think, Mr. Blake—" began Lucy, shivering.

"Hold your tongue!" snarled Lorn, and whirled on Blake. "I don't know what all this is about, but it seems you're trying to make a mystery out of an ordinary accident."

"Certainly sounds like it," Jamieson butted in airily.

"I don't matter whether you believe it or not!" burst out Tinker angrily. "The man is dead, and he wasn't drowned. He was battered to death!"

The remark silenced them. Blake puffed slowly on his pipe, then frowned and took it from his mouth to listen. The clock was loud and distinct, but the faint creaking sound seemed to be growing louder.

Blake stepped towards the counter and stopped again.

"Listen! What's that creaking noise?" he said.

A tense silence fell. The creaking was a clear and distinct, and was suddenly broken by a noisy gasp of relief from Lorn.

"It's the sign outside," he said huskily. "It swings in the wind and groans."

"There is no breath of wind to-night," Blake answered quietly.

"Then it's rats," said Jamieson carelessly. "They squeak, too, don't they?"

"Maybe—except that it's too regular," said the detective. "It seems to be coming from down the cellar."

"Oh!" cried Lorn, with a short, nervous laugh. "It's that foot Tom. He's down there. Tom!

Hey, Tom!" he shouted to the cellar steps.

"What are you doing down there?"

Silence. There was no answer from the cellar.

"The old fool's asleep!" snapped Lorn. "Go and wake him up, Lucy."

The girl hesitated and looked back nervously.

"I don't like to go alone," she said in a frightened voice.

"What, frightened of mice?" roared Lorn contemptuously.

"There was no answer from the cellar. Go and throw something at him!"

Again she hesitated.

"All right," she said, and crossed to the cellar steps and began to go down them.

She reached the foot of the steps, and there was a silence for several seconds. Then she uttered a fearful shriek that rang through the parlour.

"What the blazes is the matter?" bellowed Lorn, going grey again.

"Let me get by!" snapped Blake, and pushed the girl backwards to one side as he made for the cellar steps.

As he approached them the girl came running up, her eyes staring wildly from her dead white face.

"Tom! It's Tom!" she screamed. "He's hung himself! Hung himself on the beam down there!"

She staggered against Lorn, and then collapsed in a dead faint.

Blake ran down the steep wooden stairs into the cellar, and Tinker followed close behind him.

And across the floor of the cellar lay a grotesque shadow thrown by an oil lamp. It was the shadow of a man hanging by the neck from a ceiling beam, and turning slowly from right to left, and back again.

And as he turned the taut rope creaked monotonously.

## Murder in Silence

SEXTON BLAKE stepped slowly into the cellar, his eyes upon the figure of the man hanging from the black oak ceiling beam.

"And a hand, Tinker," he said quietly.

"Got to get him down. Shove that stool over here."

Tinker pushed a stool across the floor, and Blake climbed on to it to cut down the dead potman. In half a minute Tom was lying on the floor, and Blake stepped down from the stool.

Upon the stairs near the top, Lorn's grey face stared pop-eyed into the cellar.

Behind him, in the shadows, could be seen Gordon. Jamieson was attending to the fainting Lucy above.

"Suicide, eh?" muttered Lorn.

"Murder, Mr. Lorn," Blake corrected him.

"He could not have got up there by himself. The nearest thing he could have stood on was this stool—and it was ten feet away from him."

"Murder!" gasped Lorn. "But how—? There was no sound down here at all!"

Blake looked round the cellar. The walls were of ancient bricks, interlaced with black oak beams. Onions, hams, and cheeses hung from the ceiling beams. A range of barrels stood on racks along three walls.

Along the fourth wall there were four large wine barrels, standing upright on a raised stone bench. These barrels were four feet high.

From a beam near the stairs an oil lamp hung, burning with a yellow light.

"No sound at all," said Blake softly. "Are you sure of that?"

"Well—" Lorn hesitated, trying to remember. "Yes, pretty sure. There was no big noise, anyhow. We were all being very quiet up here—kept listening."

Lorn came slowly down into the cellar and stood still, staring down at the dead man's feet.

"What were you listening for?" asked Blake, frowning.

"Did you expect something to happen?"

"No—not exactly," muttered Lorn, and scratched his head. "But we were all on edge like."

Gordon came down behind the landlord, and looked everywhere but at Tom. Jamieson appeared at the stair head and came clattering down it. The young man stopped, and his bright eyes seemed to glare over and become cold and hard.

"Murder, eh?" he said, keeping up his bantering tone. "Looks like another job for you, Mr. Blake. Two in one night."

"MacLaren!" said Lorn, with a violent start. "I'd forgotten!"



LUCY

"I—I don't like to go alone!"

"He's safe enough in your boathouse!" cut in Blake. "His death is very different from this. Tom was deliberately and cold-bloodedly murdered under your very noses."

"But why did he hear nothing of it?" demanded Gordon snappily.

"For the obvious reason that the murderer made no noise," Blake answered dryly.

He stared about the cellar, but apart from Tom and the remains of the cut rope which still hung to the beam, there was no sign that the place had been disturbed.

"How many people in this house?" Blake asked suddenly.

"Why, Mr. Gordon, Mr. Jamieson, Lucy, me, and—Tom," said Lorn awkwardly. "And you two, of course, sir."

"Nobody else at all?"

"No, sir."

"No maid? No cook?"

"No, sir. Business isn't good enough now," said Lorn, stroking his jaw. "Can't afford 'em. Tom and Lucy did everything."

"How many customers have there been to-night?" Blake queried, watching Lorn closely.

"Only—only MacLaren," answered Lorn.

"Lucy can tell you that."

"She's resting up in the parlour," said Jamieson, jerking his thumb at the steps.

"Better let her stay there. She's been shaken up."

"So that when the murder was done," said Blake slowly, "there were only you three gentlemen and Lucy in the house?"

"Quite so," said Gordon swiftly. "And we were all together in the parlour upstairs. No one left the room at all after Tom came down here."

"Exactly," said Jamieson, shoving his hands into his pockets.

"Then the murderer is hiding in this cellar!" Blake snapped.

He turned suddenly, in time to see one of the huge wine barrels topple and fall with a crash from the stone ledge on which it had stood.

Crack! Crack!

Two revolver shots shattered the oil lamp, and the cellar was suddenly plunged into darkness.

Blake felt someone fall heavily against him, and the sudden blow sent him backwards against the cellar wall.

"The stairs, Tinker! Guard the stairs!" he shouted.

Gordon and Lorn seemed to be shouting at one another, and there were sounds of scuffling and crashes as the blinded men stumbled into articles standing about in the cellar.

Blake pushed the man who had stumbled against him to one side, and from his sheer dead weight guessed that it was Lorn. The shouts echoed in the cellar, and Blake snatched at his pocket for an electric torch.

He snapped it on and shone the light across the cellar towards the stairs.

The stairs were empty, but Tinker lay half-crouching on the floor beside them, as if he had been knocked down there and half-winded.

Jamieson had hold of Gordon round the neck, and seemed to be trying to throw him to the ground, but as he tried to get out he saw his mistake, and let go. He stood back panting, his hair dishevelled.

Lorn was sitting on the floor, gasping like a new-born babe.

Two small barrels had been knocked off their pedestals and were leaking their contents over the floor.

That was all there was to be seen in the cellar. Tom's body—even the vestige of rope from the beam—had vanished. Every scrap of evidence to show there had been a murder had gone!

"He got by—up the stairs before we could reach him, guv'nor!" Tinker panted, scrambling to his feet. I could have grabbed him, but someone gave me a terrific wallop in the dark—"

"Must have been me," said Jamieson breathlessly. "I hit out at someone pushed past me. I suppose I was you."

"Wait here, you three!" Blake snapped, and ran up the steps with Tinker behind him.

Lucy lay as white and still as death on a sofa against the parlour wall. The parlour door was open, but the girl would have seen nothing of the unknown who had escaped this way.

The detective rushed out of the inn and came to a standstill on the steps. The yellow ring of a rising moon showed over the mountains on the north shore, and shed a faint light over the lake.

"See anything, guv'nor?" panted Tinker, halting behind his master.



Blake ran down the cellar stairs and immediately saw what had terrified the girl, Lucy. Across the floor of the cellar lay a grotesque shadow, thrown by an oil lamp.

Blake scanned the lake shore, but for a mile on either side of the inn the shore was thickly planted with trees and bushes.

"There!" cried the detective, and pointed to a break in the trees a quarter of a mile away.

A man had broken out of their cover and was running fast along the mid of the beach, making for another clump of trees fifty yards farther on.

He vanished in amongst them as Blake and Tinker began to sprint after the fugitive. Blake kept his eyes on the lake, close to where the man had regained the cover of the trees.

Then suddenly the detective's step faltered and he uttered an exclamation.

For close to the shore a broiling whirlpool of foam suddenly appeared, and in the yellow moonlight the monstrous black head of the strange serpent of the lake rose out of the water and seemed to uncoil at the shore.

A scream of terror rent the air, and it came from behind the trees where the fugitive had vanished.

The giant head slipped back into the water again and vanished, leaving an utter silence and a mark of foam which faded like a mirage.

Sweat broke out on the detective's brow as he ran on. The horror of the scream, and the sudden appearance of the terror of the lake had shocked him profoundly.

Tinker's face was white, and he ran with his mouth shut tight.

They came down on to the shore, and along the mud could be seen the footprints of the running man, now filling with water. The prints led along the shore opposite the clump of trees behind which the man had been cut off from his pursuers' sight.

They stopped suddenly, ending in two long, dragging grooves in the mud which led towards the water, then finished a yard from the water's edge.

The detective stopped, panting, and stared out over the lake. The water lay still and placid, leaving no trace of the tragedy it had swallowed into its inky depths.

"Heavens!" Blake muttered. "This is too horrible, Tinker! Too fantastic! I've never heard of such a thing!"

"But no one knows really what horrors do live in the sea, guv'nor," said Tinker hoarsely. "And a monster like this could get from the sea into the loch—"

Blake turned away.

"No, no!" he said grimly. "I don't believe it! There is some explanation—something that cannot possibly be as horrible as this appears—"

"But what can it be, guv'nor?" Tinker asked blankly. "You've seen the thing twice, and besides this man—whoever he was—there was MacLaren's body."

"I know," the detective snapped, turning to his assistant. "But there is also Tom's murder. That seems to me to be too much of a coincidence, happening at the very time when this monster appears."

Tinker watched his master carefully. Blake

was horrified by the sequence of terrible events which he had found that night, but the cool, methodical brain was already at work trying to piece the fragments together into a whole.

"You think that all these things are connected up somehow, guv'nor?" Tinker asked.

"Of course," Blake answered, frowning. "They must be, but at present I cannot see how. Let's get back to the inn. The murderer has gone. It's no use looking for him any more, but I don't see how he could have got Tom's body out of the inn—unless the man had superhuman strength."

"Tom wasn't heavy, guv'nor," Tinker pointed out.

"I know that," the detective answered. "But you must think of the speed at which the man worked. That light was out for no more than twenty seconds."

They began to walk hurriedly back towards the inn. As they went, there was a faint, distant roar.

The detective stopped and looked back over the lake, but the face of it was still placid.

But the distant roar continued, and as it grew clearer, it seemed to be coming from the mountains two or three miles away along the loch.

"What is it, guv'nor?" Tinker asked curiously.

"Sounds like a wave," answered the detective, then he narrowed his eyes and glanced into the distance towards the west end of the lake. "Do you see that?"

Two miles away a thin white line of foam was racing along the surface of the lake. It spread from shore to shore, and was approaching the east at terrific speed.

"Looks like a wave," muttered Tinker. "One of the mountain reservoirs must have burst. Quick, Tinker! Back to the inn!"

They ran fast, but the swelling roar of the flood waters seemed to be gaining upon them from behind. The water ran over the surface of the lake in a roaring wall of white foam, six feet high.

It spread over the shores on either side, and small trees and bushes were being swept away on the fury of the tidal wave.

Blake and Tinker reached the inn, which had been built fairly high on the ground in case of flood. They ran up the steps to the door at this point, and there halted to look back at the tidal wave.

It roared like thunder now, and the snapping and cracking of falling trees sounded faint and dim in the uproar.

Lorn and Jamieson appeared in the doorway as Blake and Tinker looked back.

"Merciful heavens!" shouted Lorn. "It's happened. The reservoir in the mountains has burst. It's been cracking for weeks, after all that rain—"

"Come in! Shut the doors! Shut everything!"

But even as he spoke, the edge of the wave struck the side wall of the inn and burst up into a flurry of spray which rained down upon the men like a cloudburst.

## Flood

"LINKER and Blake pushed their way in through the door, for Lorn, in his anxiety to close it, almost locked the two outside. The water came in, he slammed, booted and barred the door, then stood back, his face gleaming with sweat.

"What a night!" he panted. "Murder—and now this!"

Outside the roar of the flood thundered on the air. The water swirled and eddied about the foundations of the inn, hissing and crashing with the fury of sea waves.

The broken branches of trees were flung against the walls as cracks like rifle fire came. The inn, built many years before at the base of the mountains, had been placed high up from the ground on thick, false walls so that the ground floor level was eight feet higher than the ground level.

The inn cellar itself, although it burrowed into the ground beneath the house, was protected from flood first by the false foundation walls of the house, and secondly by the great thickness of its own walls.

So long as the water-level did not rise higher than eight feet it was unlikely that the inn itself would be flooded inside.

"This has happened before," said Gordon nervously. "Twenty years ago it struck. They should have built the reservoir stronger."

"It's a bit late to talk about that now!" Blake snapped, and turned back into the parlour, frowning.

He looked worried and depressed, as well he might, for this natural catastrophe would have washed away all trace of the two murders.

He pulled aside the curtains and stared out. The inn was now surrounded by the foaming waters of the flood, and the little boathouse in which he and Tinker had laid the dead MacLaren was now no more than a shattered mass of planks and spars floating away on the flood.

And if Tom's body had been left somewhere outside the inn by the fleeing murderer, that would be washed away, too.

Jamieson was standing leaning on the counter and eying Blake quizzically.

"Looks like a wet night," he said, unmoved by the flood. "Did the murderer get away?"

"He got away from us," Blake answered pointedly.

"You mean he got drowned in the flood?" asked Jamieson.

"Perhaps," Blake said, bringing out his pipe again. "Where is the boy Lucy?"

"She went up to bed," Jamieson said. "The poor kid's been scared out of her wits. I gave her a good dose of aspirin. She'll sleep like a log till morning now."

Lorn and Gordon came into the parlour. The landlord was in a terrible state of nerves. He trembled all over and the sweat was continually breaking out on his grey face.

He poured himself another drink and swallowed it quickly.

"We shall be cut off for days," he muttered, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand.

"When it happened I heard it was five days before the flood went down."

"This inn seems pretty watertight," the detective said idly.

"Ay, it was built to keep the water out in case it rose," answered Lorn.

Outside the roar of the flood wave was drawing away into the distance. The sound of the water surging at the inn walls was clear, like sea against the sides of a ship.

Jamieson stretched himself and yawned loudly.

"I'm going to get some sleep, anyhow," he said. "We can't push back the flood, so we might as well make the best of it. Good-night."

Gordon dropped into a seat and remained still, staring ahead of him, rocking. The detective went out, and they heard him whistling as he tramped up the stairs.

"Might as well follow his example, Tinker," the detective said wistfully. "There doesn't seem to be anything we can do down here."

"Right-ho, guv'nor!" Tinker answered.

They left Gordon and Lorn in the parlour, and went upstairs into the bedrooms. The detective sat on the bed and stared out of the still open window.

Below the water gurgled about the inn. The loch had smooched out again after the passing of the wave, but it was scattered now with

broken branches and the wreckage of small boathouses it had carried away in its flight.

"What do you make of it all, guv'nor?" Tinker asked. "Do you still think the monster and Tom are somehow connected up?"

"I don't," Blake answered. "But I cannot see any chance of proving it now. The flood must have washed every shred of evidence away, and the murderer—"

He shrugged. "Heaven only knows what really happened to him."

"But why was Old Tom murdered?" asked Tinker blankly. "He was such an inoffensive sort of fellow."

"He told you too much," came the answer. "He was the only one in this house who had seen the monster, and he talked about it. That was why he was killed—because it was dangerous to allow him to talk any more."

"I see," said Tinker quietly. "So that's how the two things join up."

The door was flung wide as he spoke, and a faint shadowy figure appeared there for a brief instant.

The detective caught Tinker by the arm and flung him face down across the bed. As he did so, he himself slid off the edge of the bed to the floor.

Phut! Phut!

Two bodies struck into the wall by the bed-head, then the door closed, and Blake sprang up.

He rushed to the door, closely followed by



OLD TOM, the  
POTMAN,  
"... I tell ye,  
there's a curse  
on this place  
Things is going  
from bad to  
worse..."

Tinker, and flung it open. The passage was empty, but there were sounds of voices from a near-by room, and a streak of light shining from a partly open door.

Blake went to the door and looked in.

There were three men in there. Jamieson sitting on the bed, putting on his pyjamas; Gordon leaning on the curtain talking to him; and Lorn standing near the door, holding a lighted candle in his hand.

Jamieson looked up.

"Hallo! The detective," he said. "What's the matter?"

"Fifty," snapped Blake. "How long have you three been here together?"

"Two minutes," answered Gordon, and turned away from the bed. "I'm going to my own room. Good-night!"

He passed out of the bed-room, and the landlord followed him.

"Better lock your doors to-night," Blake said tersely, and turned and ran down the stairs.

He dashed on the torch and made a swift examination of every room on the ground floor. There was nobody there.

"The fellow must have gone somewhere, guv'nor!" Tinker said, as they began to mount the stairs again.

As they reached the top, the door of the bath-room opened, and Jamieson came out, with a towel slung over his shoulders.

"Hallo! Still snooping around?" he said lightly. "My word! You're having a restless night."

"When you were talking to the other two in your room," snapped Blake, "did you hear anyone in the passage outside?"

Jamieson stared blankly at the detective.

"I heard you," he answered.

"Did you hear anyone just before you heard me?"

The young man stared from the detective to Tinker, then back again.

"Of course not," he said. "Who else could there be? Unless the girl's awake," he added suddenly.

"But shouldn't think she was. Why? What's all the excitement about?"

"I'm just trying to find out," answered Blake, looking back along the corridor. "Which is the girl's room?"

"The one right at the far end of the passage," said Jamieson, yawning again.

Blake and Tinker went along the passage to the girl's room, and looked in.

Lucy was sleeping heavily in her bed. The detective switched on the light, but the sudden blaze did not have any effect on the sleeper.

He turned off the light and closed the door again.

"Surely you don't suspect her, guv'nor?" demanded Tinker.

"But she is the only one left," the detective answered. He frowned, and ran his fingers through his hair. "The other three were together."

"Perhaps the murderer came back by boat," Tinker suggested, as they returned to Blake's room.

The detective went to the open window and stared down. The water was flowing fast towards the east, and around the inn there were violent eddies and whirlpools.

"You'd never be able to get a boat near with those cross-currents," the detective said. "Look at them! A rowing-boat would be sucked under or smashed to pieces against the wall."

"Then there must be a hiding-place somewhere!" said Tinker eagerly.

"No," Tinker. Blake answered, pacing up and down the room. "We saw the murderer running away along the lakeshore. The trees hid him at the very moment when it appeared he had been attacked by the monster."

"Perhaps he was not attacked. Perhaps he jumped from the mud where his footprints showed to the hard earth round the trees where he was not seen, and the scream he gave was all part of his act!"

"And then he ran back here by taking cover amongst the trees?" cried Tinker. "Gosh! That does sound more like it!"

"In which case, he is still in the house somewhere, because now he cannot get out!"

## The Invisible Man

BLAKE went to the door and opened it.

There was no sound but the surging of the water against the inn walls below.

If the murderer was roaming somewhere in that house, he moved as silently as a cat.

Tinker followed his master to the door. The yellow moonlight threw strange patches of shadow along the silent corridor, and dust floated, sparkling in the moonbeams.

"The man vanished," Blake murmured. "He had no time to get down the stairs. He must have hidden within a few feet of the door."

The next room to Blake's was Gordon's; the one opposite was Jamieson's. Then there were three empty rooms, the landlord's room, and Lucy's, who apparently slept in the loft above, but there had been no time for the murderer to get up there.

The bath-room door yawned across the passage, but it had been modernized, and the walls were lined with white glazed tiling.

There could be no secret opening in that, and the murderer had hidden in there he would have had no chance of getting out again without being seen.

And Jamieson had gone into it within three minutes of the murderer's disappearance.

He might have got into one of the empty rooms, guv'nor," Tinker suggested.

"But Jamieson's door was open," Blake pointed out. "Three wide-awake men in there. He would have been seen passing the doorway—and don't forget, they heard no sound until they heard us."

"You must have searched the passage, and scratched his tousled head."

"Sounds as if the murderer is the Invisible Man, guv'nor," he said.

"Or else one of these wall paper or a trapdoor."

Blake shone his torchlight on to the dark oak



of the panelling on the passage wall and examined it closely. He searched every inch of the panelling in the area which the murderer could have reached in the time he had had to do it.

The detective straightened.

"Nothing there, Tinker," he said, frowning.

He shone his light to the ceiling, but the black beams and the plaster between them were solid enough. The floor was covered by a plain, grey carpet, and there could not possibly be a trap-door in that.

Then suddenly the detective turned and darted towards the stairs. From somewhere below there came a clink of a glass, and then the sound of soft footsteps crossing the parlour floor.

Blake went down the stairs quickly, making as little noise as possible. He hesitated outside the parlour door, which was open about an inch, and showed a faint, flickering light at the crack. Someone inside the parlour started humming softly. Blake pushed open the door.

"So it's you, Jamieson," he said. "I didn't know you come down."

The young man laughed, and waved a half-full glass in the air.

"Always considerate, me!" he grinned. "Didn't want to wake you, knowing how tired you were, so I crept down like a mouse, and poured myself a drink. Have one?"

No, thanks."

Blake turned as Tinker came into the room behind him.

"Those shots didn't miss us by much, guv'nor," he said, looking at Jamieson. "They're both stuck in the wall just about where we were sitting."

"Shots?" queried Jamieson, staring. "When?"

"About fifteen minutes ago," answered Blake, crossing to the window.

He lifted the curtain and looked out over the swirling waters, shining like a silver sea in the moonlight.

"I heard nothing," protested Jamieson. "No bangs."

"This gun had a silencer fitted to it," Blake answered dryly. "It makes no more noise than an air-pistol."

So they took a potshot at you!" said Jamieson, and gave a short laugh. "Hiccup!"

Blake talked to it, and so he did. But he talked to it, and we heard what he said—therefore we shall have to go, too."

"It all sounds rather gloomy," said Jamieson, with a comical look at his lips. "And for what sake don't you tell me what it's all about! I don't want my appendix perforated!"

Even as he finished speaking there was a heavy thump on the floor above, followed by the sound of feet dragging across the floor. Two more distant crashes followed.

"Gordon having a nightmare," said Jamieson.

"It doesn't sound like—," began Blake, motioning towards the parlour door.

When he was half across the room there came a distant, choking cry in Gordon's voice.

"Blake! Help—quick!"

The detective flung open the door and ran out on the passage. But as he went, silence fell in the room above. The sounds of scuffling ceased.

Blake raced up the dark stairs to the top, and ran across the corridor to Gordon's room, flashing his torch as he went.

The beam showed the door of Gordon's room wide open, and, just showing inside, a limp, out-hung arm and hand.

The detective ran into the room and halted. Gordon lay crumpled on the floor with a knife through his back.

Blake knelt beside him, not noticing that Tinker had followed closely behind him all the time. He half raised his head to shout for his young assistant, then stopped as he saw him standing close by.

"Help me get him on the bed," Blake gasped.

"But I think it's too late."

They lifted Gordon from the floor, and as they turned to carry him to the bed Jamieson could be seen standing at the stairhead outside, staring blankly towards Gordon's room.

Gordon was brought to the bed, and the detective switched on the light over the bed to examine the wound.

"Water, Tinker!" he snapped. "Be quick!"

His assistant crossed the room to a washhand-



Sexton Blake flung Tinker across the bed, at the same time dropping to the floor. Through the open door a shadowy figure appeared and two bullets struck the wall as the assassin fired at them.

stand, and as he went the dying man gave a cry, rattling moan, and then became silent.

All right, Tinker, don't worry," the detective said, straightening his back. He glanced quickly round the room.

The clothes had been pulled off the bed, but the struggle between the murderer and his victim had not upset anything else.

There was nowhere in the room to hide, and Blake went out into the corridor, where Jamieson was still standing at the stairhead. Lorn was coming out of his room, his eyes wide, and fumbling to tie the cords of his dressing-gown about his middle.

"Anyone go down the stairs?" snapped Blake.

"No," Jamieson answered. "I followed you up, more or less."

Then the murderer is still on this floor," said Blake in a low tone.

He drew his torch from his pocket and approached one of the empty bed-rooms.

"Search our room, Tinker," he said. "Though I don't think the devil went in there."

Tinker went one way and Blake went the other. The detective opened the doors of all three empty rooms, and one glance at the floor of each told him all he wanted to know.

But, in each of all-rooms at the time had not been over careful to keep these rooms clean. A thin layer of dust lay upon the boards inside each of the three rooms, and no signs of a footprint showed.

Lorn and Jamieson remained standing at the stairhead, and no one could get by them. The detective and Tinker searched every room on that floor—including looking one more into the heavily sleeping Lucy's room—and found nothing.

How do you get up to the top?" Blake demanded, returning to the two men at the stairhead.

"Pull that rope there," said Lorn hoarsely, pointing to the passage wall.

The detective unfurled the rope from a hook

in the wall and pulled. The left trapdoor in the ceiling slid aside, and a telescopic ladder came slowly down from the trap to the passage floor.

Blake mounted the wooden steps and clambered up into the loft.

Under the sloping beams of the roof stood Tom's bed, an old tin trunk containing his belongings, and a washstand. There was nothing else, and no possible place where a man could hide.

Once again the unknown had struck, only to vanish again, although there was apparently nowhere where he could have gone.

"This is incredible!" Blake muttered. "There must be an explanation, and a logical one—but what in Heaven's name is it? How does the devil vanish under our very noses?"

### Three Suspects

BLAKE went down from the attic and joined Tinker in Gordon's bed-room. Tinker had searched the whole room thoroughly, but apart from the knife, the murderer had left no clue to his identity.

"And the knife looks like one stolen from the kitchen downstairs," the detective said, carrying the stained weapon, wrapped in a handkerchief, out to the landing, where Lorn and Jamieson still stood.

The landlady looked very sick, and went pale as a ghost when Blake showed him the knife.

"Do you recognise this?" the detective asked.

Lorn nodded, gulped, and made a spluttering noise.

"Yes, it's—it's one of the carvers from the kitchen," he said hoarsely.

Suddenly his voice rose, and he shouted:

"Merciful Heaven! What in the devil's name is happening? We are all to be murdered in our beds? I won't stand it!"

He turned and ran heavily down the stairs, still shouting. He rushed like a madman to the main door of the inn and flung it open. He began to rush out, and stopped himself in time. His voice died away. He stood stupidly staring at the sullen grey water which isolated the house.

He turned back, closed the door, and leant his back against it, panting heavily.

The three men at the top of the stairs looked down at him, but said nothing. Lorn was in a funk of utter despair. He was frightened out of his wits.

The succession of crimes had driven him into a panic in which he had even forgotten the flood of two hours before. Now he leant against the door, stunned, his mouth moving.

No escape—no escape," he whispered.

He dragged himself away from the door and went into the parlour. Jamieson began to go down the stairs.

"I think he needs looking after," he said, and went down into the parlour.

"Did you find anything up in the loft, guv'nor?" Tinker asked quietly.

"Nothing at all, Tinker," Blake said, diving his hands into his coat pockets. "Gordon's gone now. But why worry? He's suddenly become a danger to the murderer? If we knew that we could tell who the murderer is!"

He went back into Gordon's room, followed by Tinker. The window of the room was drawn aside, and through it could be seen the silver face of the lake.

"He must have seen something, guv'nor," said Tinker, pointing to the window. "Fancy he saw that thing—the monster—and saw what it really was."

"But how did the murderer know so suddenly that Gordon had become a danger because he had seen something through the window?" asked Blake, shaking his head. "That would mean that the murderer was in this room with him."

"Of course," Tinker said, frowning round the room. "And I've been here all round the walls here. There's no secret panel, or anything like that where he could hide and watch Gordon."

"No, it must be that Gordon died because he suddenly saw the murderer and realised that he was the murderer," said Blake, pacing the floor slowly. "That provides the motive, but does not help us."

"Well, it couldn't be Jamieson," Tinker remarked. "He was with us when this happened."

"And Lorn wasn't," added Blake slowly. "But Lorn was with Jamieson and Gordon when the

attempt was made on us, and he was with them when Tom was hanged."

"That's true," muttered Tucker. "That leaves only the girl—Lucy," he added, looking up at the detective.

"How could she have murdered Tom? She was with the other three all the time in the parlour," protested Blake, and went to the bedroom door again.

"Look at this corridor, Tinker," he said. "It is in this small area that the murderer was his vanishing trick. There are ten doors, including the bath-room; the staircase; a window at each end; and a trapdoor to the loft."

"And no trick panels or anything," muttered Tinker.

"The empty rooms have not been used," Blake went on. "The dust in them proves that. Both Lorn and Jamieson have been in one or other of the murders, consequently the murderer would not dare to try to hide in either of their rooms. The murderer did not come into our room at any time, thus, is further than the doorway, when he shot at us."

"After that shot was fired he might have hidden in the bath-room, but Jamieson went into it a minute or two after and there was no one there."

"Might he have got out of the bath-room window?" Tinker asked.

"Too small," said the detective, "and, like the two windows in this passage, hasn't been opened for years. They're all stuck."

"Could he have got down the stairs after he had shot at us? If he moved pretty fast, I mean?" queried Tinker, frowning.

"He could not have done so without showing himself openly at Jamieson's door, where the three men were. Don't forget, Lorn was standing right by the door at that time."

"Well, he hasn't been into my room," Tinker said, in a tone of exasperation, "because when I came out of it—when we went to pick up MacLaren from the shore—I dropped my dressing-gown on the floor, and then, of course, I didn't trouble to pick it up, and when I looked just now it wasn't kicked aside or anything."

"Nobody could have got in without kicking it," he ended.

"Well, there you are!" Blake snapped, throwing his hands up in a gesture of despair. "We've cleared every possibility of suspicion; every known person in the house has an alibi which makes it impossible for any one of them to have done these murders."

"But this is ridiculous, guv'nor!" cried Tinker. "It means the murderer must be a ghost!"

"It wasn't a ghost who hid in the barrel in the cellar," the detective pointed out, "and it wasn't a ghost who carried Tom's body up the cellar steps in the dark and got him out of the house!"

A silence fell. From below came the faint tinkle of glass. Lorn was apparently reviving himself from his shattered state of nerves.

"Tinker, my hands are tied," said the detective suddenly. "I can't go out, or the murderer now, because if I do we shall never know the secret of the thing we have been sent here to find out. I can't go out, because my business! He is killing now, but we must still wait and hold our hand, because only by doing that can we discover the secret behind it all, and save a thousand lives."

The detective jerked round as he heard the sound of a door opening in the corridor. Lucy, hugging a dressing-gown round her and with a face white as death, came out of her room.

"Oh dear!" she said, touching her forehead. "I've been having such terrible nightmares!"

Blake looked keenly at her.

"What woke you, Lucy?" he asked. "I thought you'd taken a lot of aspirin."

"Yes," she nodded, wide-eyed like a child. "Yes, I did. I feel all right now, but—I was frightened, you see. I had a dream that frightened me."

She shivered violently, came towards the detective, and stopped by him, looking up into his face.

"I don't want to be left alone," she said faintly. "Please don't leave me alone any more!"

"But, Lucy, it was only a dream that frightened you," the detective said soothingly, and shifted his position so that he screened her view of Gordon's room.

"I know," she whispered, and trembled again.

"But it was so—so horrible! Oh, I know I shouldn't be frightened of it, but it's all the

things that's happened to—him. Take me away from here, Mr. Blake! Please take me away from here!"

The detective caught her by the shoulders and steadied her.

"No one can leave this house, Lucy, until the morning," he said. "We have been off by a flood."

Tears appeared in her eyes. There was a silence, then she gave a little sob.

"Oh!"

"You're not to be frightened, Lucy," Blake said softly. "I know it's easy for me to say that, but you must try. The night is long, but it won't last for ever. Soon it will be daylight, and things look so different in the light."

She nodded.

"I'll try," she whispered, "but I don't want to sleep. I don't want to dream any more."

Blake glanced suddenly aside at Tinker. The girl was only now emerging from the drugged effect of a quality of aspirin.

"What was the dream, Lucy?" Blake asked. "You know, sometimes if you tell people about the things that frighten you you lose the fear of them."

"I was—I was—then brought out a small handkerchief and blew her nose."

"It was—? I thought I saw a man—looking like—my window," she said, and shivered violently.

"But the curtains are drawn, Lucy," said the detective very quietly, and his eyes narrowed a little.

"I saw them open and shut, and then—"

"He seemed to be behind the curtains," she said, frowning like a puzzled child. "He seemed—yes! Now I remember! He was behind the curtains! He pulled them apart and looked in at me—ever so quick. It was. Then he put them together again."

There was a gasp in Blake's eye.

"Let us look in your room," he said gently, "and show me exactly what you mean."

"There was a possibility now that he was right; that he might have been so near to me, and really, but he was anxious not to put the girl into a fit of panic again."

They went together into the girl's room. The curtain over the window reached from the floor to the ceiling, and were of heavy black stuff.

"He seemed to be behind there," she said, stopping by the bed and pointing.

The detective approached the curtains and pulled them slowly apart. The window was open.

"Do you always have your window as wide as this?" Blake asked.

"Mr. Jamieson opened it for me when he helped me up here," she answered. "He said as I'd had a lot of aspirin I'd better not sleep in a stuffy room."

"He was out of the window and looked down. There was a ledge of brick, three inches wide, about three feet below the sill. It ran all round the walls of the inn."

"He was looking at me for a moment, then straightened and closed the window. He turned back to the girl with a smile."

"No one could possibly have been out there," he said. "Now take my advice. Try to sleep. I've locked the window, so you needn't dream about that any more. And we shall be outside in the passage and see that no one disturbs you till morning."

"Thank you, Mr. Blake," she said, with a tearful smile. "I'll try."

He took her by the shoulder and went out of the room, closing the door softly behind him. He went back to Tinker, who still stood at the stair-head.

"Somebody's been climbing about on a brick ledge on the outside wall of the house," Blake snapped. "The bricks are scratched. At one time or another the murderer actually got into the room by the window and hid here while we were searching for him."

"She saw him, but she was so dazed she thought it was a dream."

"Climbing about on a ledge!" gasped Tinker. "So that's how he does it! Like a cat burglar!"

"Yes, but that doesn't explain how he got to the room by the window and hid here while we were searching for him."

"He did not go through Lucy's room, because if she saw him behind the curtains she would also have seen him pass through the room."

"And when we were attacked he still could not

have got there without being seen by the three in Jamieson's bedroom," added Tinker.

"The ledge runs all round the house, I believe," the detective answered, "and went to the window at the end of the passage next to his own room. He drew the curtains aside, and examined the window frame carefully."

"But this window is stuck," he muttered. "Hasn't been opened for months."

"The window of your room is open," suggested Tinker, suddenly.

"You're not suggesting that after shooting at us, he rushed through our own room, clambered through our window, and got out to the ledge without us seeing him, Tinker?"

Blake grinned, then turned to the passage window again.

He stared out over the lake. Across the surface shone a white feather of spray, travelling fast. It spread into a foaming oval of water, and in the middle of the phosphorescent spray, the black, shining head of a monster appeared.

It sank again, but reappeared above the surface fifty yards farther on. It dived finally, leaving the foaming marks of its appearance to fade and die away.

"Again!" murmured the detective. "What in heaven's name is it?"

He saw no reason to Tinker.

"I tell you just what it snapped. 'I am sure, beyond all doubt, that this thing in the lake is the cause of the deaths in this house! If we could only find out what that thing really is we should have a complete solution to the case.'"

Tinker ran his fingers through his hair and frowned out over the lake.

"What's the matter? See how they connect up, guv'nor," he sighed.

They watched the lake anxiously, but the thing did not appear again.

"Just a minute, guv'nor!" said Tinker suddenly. "Perhaps there isn't a vanishing man at all. Perhaps they were all in it, and Tom found it."

"Then they killed him in the cellar, and all their alibis go at once. So does the alibi about the shock on us. And then Gordon got the wind up about what had really happened, the game away, so they had to get rid of him!"

The detective brought out his pipe and tapped it thoughtfully in the palm of his hand.

"That's a very simple solution," he said quietly. "It explains everything—but one matter."

"What's that?"

"We are the danger. It was because Tom was going to talk to us that he died. It was because Gordon was getting ready to talk to us that he was killed."

"But why kill Gordon? If they wanted to stop us learning something, why not kill us?"

"We are too two, and we are unarmed."

"That makes sense," said Tinker. "I hadn't thought of it like that."

## The Blank Wall

"LL have a word with the two downstairs."

Tinker, said Blake, turning. "I think you'd better say up here. This corridor is not a good place to leave alone."

"I've got to go down to the kitchen. But went downstairs to the parlour, where Lorn was sitting on a chair by the fire, holding a glass in one hand and a bottle in the other."

"He came up with a start as the detective came in, then sighed with relief. Jamieson lounged at the counter, idly smoking a cigarette."

"Any news yet?" Jamieson asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Not unless you can tell me how Lorn or you can be in two places at once!" Blake retorted. "Jamieson laughed, and the detective turned to the landlord."

"You've lived in this house a good long time, Lorn," he said.

"Twenty years," said the landlord, gulping at his glass. "But not another day. I have had enough. Enough, I tell you! The place is a shambles!" He snarled slaughterhouse—

"Steady, Lorn," he said. "Keep yourself calm. I want a careful answer to this question."

Lorn stared up into Blake's face, then shrugging, the detective took his hand from the landlord's arm.

"In all the time you've been here, have you ever been in the suspicion of any of the secret passages in the walls of the floor above this?"



The landlord spluttered. Jamieson laughed again.

"Secret passages!" Jamieson said. "Hell! Can't you think of something more original than that?"

"I never heard of any such thing, Mr. Blake," answered Lorn quickly. "And there can't be any, because I'll tell you why. Last year I had electric light put in, and the paneling had to be stripped off the walls to get the wires in behind."

"Thanks. That makes certain there's no such thing," the detective said thoughtfully. "By the way, you've got oil lighting in the cellar. Did you have the wires run down there?"

"No. It was going to cost an extra two pound," grunted Lorn, with a sour look.

"That's stood up suddenly, and his face became purple."

"And what are you supposed to be doing, asking questions of me?" he shouted. "You supposed to be a detective, aren't you? Well, all right! If you are one, who killed Tom? Who killed Gordon? Who killed 'em, eh?"

"It's fair question," said Jamieson. "But keep your temper, Lorn. You'll have a heart attack in a minute."

"Well, I mean it!" snarled Lorn. "There's a murder case in this house, and he can get out of it because nobody can get away through that flood yet! Well, where is he? Who is he? If you're Sexton Blake you ought to have found him by now!"

Lorn pointed furiously at the detective.

"That's true, Lorn—if this was a straightforward case," Blake said. "But it isn't. You sneered at Tom's stories of a monster in the loch outside, but you were wrong. It is that very thing which is bringing death into this house to-night."

"Monster?" echoed Lorn dazedly.

"Yes," the detective went on. "You say I haven't done enough, but do you realise that the first thing the first trapped the monster in the evidence of each murder but Gordon's has been stolen from us."

"What have we to work on? There is Gordon's blood, your own gun knife, and scratches on the brick ledge round the house. The murderer has worked under your very noses, yet has never been heard or seen—until he attempted to murder me in my room."

"But there must be some clue he left!" muttered Lorn, scowling.

"He's left nothing—noting at all," the detective said. "And at the very start of this case he acted in a way which showed clearly that he knew himself to be armed with a defence which he believed we cannot penetrate."

"What exactly do you mean by that?" Jamieson asked, cocking his head on one side.

"He took a risk to steal Tom's body from the cellar," Blake answered. "He wanted to remove all evidence of murder. And he took the risk of stumbling in the dark, and being caught in the confusion."

"He did not fear that risk, which you might think would show him up at once as the murderer, because he knew that if we caught him—and recognised him—we could not possibly prove that he was the murderer."

"You mean he could prove he had an alibi?" Jamieson asked narrowly.

"Certainly," Blake snapped. "Do you realise what a strange thing it is, that each time an attack has been made in this house to-night, every one has had an unassailable alibi, because they were with others at the very moments of the attacks?"

Jamieson stubbed out his cigarette in an ash-tray.

"You seem to be sorting it out well enough, Blake," he said. "It shouldn't be long before you discover what this mystery is all about."

"There are five of us left in this house," the detective said slowly. "Either one of the five is the murderer, or there is a sixth. There is no way in or out of this house now."

"It is sealed—sealed by flood, therefore if there is a sixth man, where in Heaven's name is he hiding when there is no place in the house where he can hide?"

The detective's voice rose slightly towards the end of the sentence, and revealed the strain he was feeling under the series of unexplainable happenings which had struck this house to-night.

A silence fell. The clock ticked loudly, and from outside came the faint surging of the water. The clock seemed to tick more loudly, and

Jamieson jerked his head round to the cellar trapdoor.

"You're getting the jitters," he said, a little huskily. "I half thought I could hear that damned rook creaking again."

"There's left," murmured Lorn, staring with wide eyes into the burnt-out fire. "Five of us! And which one goes next?"

"None," said Blake determinedly, and went to the door. "There!" he called up the stairs. "Knock on Lucy's door and get her to come down here. We're all going to stay together in this room, and make sure that nothing more can happen to-night."

"Right-o, guv'nor!" Tinker answered. Blake returned to the parlour.

"I didn't want to bring her down," he said frowning. "There's a bad state of nerves, and I didn't want her to know about Gordon. Still, I think it's best she should be here."

A minute later Tinker came into the room with the girl. She was wide awake now, and gazed at the men with frightened eyes.

She turned to Blake, and the fear showed clearly in her face.

"Where—where's Mr. Gordon?"

"Mr. Gordon is dead, Lucy," Blake answered gently.

"Dead! Oh!" she put a hand to her mouth, and clenched her teeth as if to stop herself letting out a scream.

"Sit down, Lucy," Blake said, putting an arm round her shoulders and leading her to the sofa. "Nothing can happen now. There's nothing more to be afraid of."

She caught his hand as she sat down, and looked up with tearful eyes.

"You're—very kind, Mr. Blake," she stammered, then let his hand go and began to cry.

"The detective patted her shoulder gently, then turned away to the door and closed it.

"Here we are—five of us," he said huskily. "Either the murderer is in this room, or—"

"The devil only knows where he is," Jamieson broke in. "Oh, damn it! Let's have a drink. This thing's getting on my nerves!"

"So even the callous Jamieson is beginning to crack," said the detective softly. "I never suspected you of being so human."

"I'm only flesh and blood like any other man!" snapped Jamieson with a grimace. "Do you think I like the idea of murderers creeping about in this house? Who knows what the devil's going to do next?"

"That's what I'm wondering," Blake answered in a low voice. But there's one thing certain. He will act again, and in that action he will give himself away!"

"Sounds very hopeful. I must say!" sneered Jamieson. He didn't give himself away when he murdered Tom—or Gordon! He didn't give himself away when he shot at you!"

The detective watched the young man narrowly. The strain had been too much for him. His nerves were cracking. There was a ring, a hysterical note in his voice.

Even Lorn stared in surprise, and forgot his own funk.

"Listen, fell again. The clock ticked, and the waters surged, but there was no other sound. Everyone was tense, as if listening.

Listening for the soft sound of the murderer's footsteps, prowling to make another kill!

Lucy shivered suddenly.

"Confound that blinking clock!" Jamieson cried violently, and grabbing up a bottle he flung it at the clock on the wall.

The shot missed, and the bottle exploded against the panelling, letting broken glass and a stream of liquid shower down the wall to the floor.

"Careful what you're doing!" shouted Lorn, the damage to his property making his greedy mind forget the danger they all stood in.

"Well, can't you stop it?" snapped the young man between his teeth. "Tick, tick, tick—it's maddening!"

"Get a grip on yourself, Jamieson," Blake said sharply. "What are you so frightened of?"

"What am I frightened of?" Jamieson cried with a hysterical laugh. The same thing as you're frightened of—death! The thing that's keeping us here in this room, listening to that damned clock, ticking, ticking, ticking—listening to it ticking away another life!"

"Steady!" the detective snapped out. "We're all together now, aren't we?"

"Yes, and we've all been together before!" shouted Jamieson, his eyes wild. "We've all

been together and the murderer has worked just the same! It's coming, I tell you! It's coming, and one of us will be dead!"

Blake hit him sharply on the side of the head. Jamieson reeled back against the counter and put a hand dazedly to his forehead.

"Blah, blah, the torrent of words was cut off and the wild light died from his eyes."

"Sorry!" he gasped breathlessly. "I seem to have lost control of my tongue."

He could look upon the murder of another person without feeling anything much about it, but once death began to threaten him, he let his fears show clearly.

His outburst seemed to have calmed the others. Lorn gave a superior sort of snarl, forgetting the panic he had shown earlier. Lucy merely stared at Jamieson.

Tinker grabbed the detective's arm suddenly.

"Guv'nor, listen!" he breathed. "The stairs!" In the silence that fell a stair creaked, faint but distinct. No one moved in the parlour.

"May be the water," Blake muttered.

"The sound came again—a stair creaking as if someone came slowly down from the floor above. Blake darted to the door and opened it. Jamieson followed close behind. They went out into the dark passage together.

The stairs were empty. There was no one with Blake but Jamieson.

The detective began to mount the stairs rapidly, then stopped half-way up and turned to look down again. Lucy screamed from the parlour.

"The light's gone out!" bawled Jamieson from below the detective. "Blake—quick!"

Blake ran down to the bottom of the stairs and caught hold of a man as he was running towards the stairs.

"Hold it!" Blake cried, and switched on his torch. "Oh, it's you, Jamieson!"

He released Jamieson and headed for the parlour. He turned the beam of his light round the room.

Lucy was crouching in a corner, hiding her face in her hands from sheer terror. Tinker was kneeling before the fireplace by the sprawling figure of Lorn.

At that moment the light came on again. Blake looked round quickly. Jamieson was standing by the doorway, his eyes wide, running his fingers dazedly through his hair.

"Shot dead!" Blake muttered, turning away from Lorn's body. "What happened, Tinker?"

"I couldn't see," guv'nor," Tinker answered. "The light went out and Lucy screamed. I was standing by Lorn, and suddenly he seemed to roll out of his chair and fall against me."

Blake's face hardened.

"Then the murderer made a mistake. He snapped. That shot was meant for you, Tinker!"

He swung round to Jamieson, his eyes glittering.

"Where's the gun, Jamieson?" he demanded. "What gun?" Jamieson answered blankly.

"The gun you used to fire this shot!" Blake snapped, advancing on the young man.

"You're mad!" Jamieson cried.

"I didn't fire it! I was out in the passage with you."

Then when I saw the light go out I ran towards you to get your torch."

Blake ran his hands over the young man's pockets, but there was no gun hidden on him.

"Search this room and the passage outside, Tinker!" ordered the detective.

"The gun must be here somewhere!"

#### GORDON

"... He does nothing but snore and snore like he was trying to smell out something!"



Tinker ran to obey. Jamieson stood with his back against the counter, and Blake facing him.

"I think this is the end of our search, Jamieson," said the detective softly. "The murderer has eliminated every suspect except himself!"

"You're backing the wrong horse," Jamieson answered calmly. He had completely recovered from his previous hysteria. Even the mark of the detective's blow on his cheek had faded away.

"There is only one left to back, Jamieson!" Blake answered.

"All right," Jamieson said, with a laugh. "Prove it! That's all you've got to do. What did I use to fire with?"

Tinker came into the room again, his face pale.

"There's no gun anywhere, guv'nor," he said. "There must be somewhere!" snapped the detective. "Look again, Tinker—look again!"

"But I've looked everywhere, guv'nor!" protested Tinker. "There's nowhere where it could be hidden—not in this room or in the passage outside."

"And I had no time to go any farther than the bottom of the stairs," sneered Jamieson. Remember, Blake? I bumped into you, and you grabbed me!"

There was no denying it. Blake remembered the encounter clearly.

Jamieson was the only male suspect left, yet Blake could himself prove the alibi which showed he could not have hidden the gun!

### The Last Man

**A**SILENCE fell, Jamieson grinned faintly. He seemed very sure of himself.

"Why don't you accuse Lucy?" he asked ironically. "She was in the room, too."

The detective watched him closely, then turned away with a shrug. Tinker showed some surprise at his master's action.

"Tinker knew that Blake's mind was made up. He knew that the detective was certain now that Jamieson was the murderer, and that was why he could not make out his master's sudden turning away from Jamieson as if he had abandoned the idea of his guilt."

"Of course," the detective said, "it was rather foolish of me to accuse you, Jamieson. When Tom was murdered, you were with Lorn, Gordon, and Lucy. When we were shot at, you were with Lorn and Gordon. When Gordon was killed, you were with Tinker and me. And just now you came out of the room with me, and bumped into me by the stairs."

"The perfect alibi," Jamieson said, in a faintly mocking tone.

"Almost perfect," the detective agreed softly.

"What do you mean—almost?" demanded Jamieson suddenly.

"Why, nothing in the world is perfect," the detective answered simply.

"But, guv'nor—" began Tinker.

"No, Tinker," said the detective, waving his hand. "It's no good going on with this as a normal case. It isn't. We must ignore the evidence as it seems to be, because obviously the evidence is false."

"What on earth do you mean by that?" Jamieson asked, staring.

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"There is no way in or out of this house for the murderer to hide," he said. "Consequently, there is only one possibility left. The murderer is not hiding at all!"

"But, that's madness!"

**JAMIESON**

"... So they took a pot-shot at me? Heaven! What a night!"

"guv'nor!" Tinker cried, staring at Blake in amazement.

"Yet we have proved that the murderer cannot be hiding in this house," the detective went on blandly. "Therefore he has not hidden at all. In other words, we must have been seeing him moving about amongst us—openly showing himself—knowing that he cannot be suspected."

Jamieson laughed harshly.

"It's a crack-brained idea!" he sneered. "It is the only answer to the mystery," Blake said. "The only possible answer. We have eliminated every possibility, and that alone remains. Consequently, that must be the answer."

The detective brought out his pipe and put it in his mouth. He appeared very calm. Lucy, who had stood at him wide-eyed in surprise, Jamieson watched with narrowed eyes.

"What do you know of this monster in the loch, Jamieson?" Blake snapped out suddenly.

"The monster?" the young man said, with a start. "Why, it's a fairy story. I've never seen any sea-serpents in the loch."

"I'm not talking about sea-serpents," Blake snapped. "I'm talking about this thing—whatever it is which is even now hiding in the depths of the lake outside this house!"

Jamieson remained still with his mouth open. The question had taken him off his guard.

"I give you ten seconds to answer, Jamieson!" Blake snatched a small automatic pistol from his pocket and levelled it at the gaping man at the counter. The barrel gleamed evilly in the light above.

"This little weapon was in Lorn's pocket," Blake snapped. "It is clear that he has been snared for some time for his life, and the reason for this was the monster! Now answer—quick! Ten seconds from now!"

Jamieson swallowed, and his face went grey. He gazed helplessly into the detective's eyes, but said nothing.

"What is the thing in the lake?" Blake repeated. "What is it?"

"No answer." The clock ticked slowly.

"Count the seconds for yourself, Jamieson!" the detective said. "What is the thing in the lake?"

There was a faint sound in the doorway.

Blake swung round suddenly, but not quickly enough. There was a stab of flame from the depths in the doorway, and a man was shot out of his hand by the terrific kick of a bullet.

The detective flung himself face down to the floor, and as he dropped, two more bullets bored into the wood of the counter above him.

Jamieson ran forward to the door. Tinker made a grab at him as he went, but the desperate man broke with the fury of a madman.

Tinker staggered back against the wall, his head singing from the force of the blow.

Jamieson ran out, and as Blake scrambled to his feet they could hear the fugitive running hard up the stairs to his room.

"Quick, Tinker!" Blake gasped, and rushed out into the passage.

The room of Jamieson's room above closed with a crash, as Blake set foot on the bottom stair, then hesitated a brief second.

"Tinker! Go into the room below Jamieson's and watch his window. See that he doesn't get out of it!"

He went on up the stairs as fast as he could, and came to the locked door of the fugitive's room. He stood to one side of it, so that no stray shot through the panels could hit him, and grasped the handle.

He rattled the door violently.

"Open the door, Jamieson!" he cried. "It's no good holding out any longer. You've walked into your own trap! Open the door!"

No answer. Absolute silence reigned behind the locked door, yet no warning came from Tinker in the room below to tell Blake that Jamieson had got out of the window of his room.

"Open the door, Jamieson!" Blake called again. "I know your secret now!"

Still there was no sound from inside the room. The silence was deathly still, then from below came the sound of the frightened Lucy, sobbing softly.

No warning came from Tinker; no sound of movement came from inside the room.

Blake waited, listening intently, and then a faint noise came from the lock of the door. It was the key turning softly.

Blake stood tensed and ready, to one side of the door. He saw the handle begin to turn slowly, and then it stopped. Gradually the door opened, and the darkness beyond, the faint shadow of a man appeared there.

The detective was ready for him. The door opened wider, and then the man inside seemed to step out.

But he did not cross the threshold on his feet. He toppled over like a waxwork dummy, and crashed on his face to the floor of the corridor at Blake's feet.

A knife protruded from his back, and as the head was twisted sideways upon the floor, the detective recognised instantly the face of Jamieson.

Tinker appeared at the bottom of the stairs and began to run up them. He had heard the crash, and feared that his master was being attacked.

"What is it, guv'nor?"

"Get back, Tinker!" Blake cried. "Get back to that window!"

He swung round to the door of Jamieson's room, but in the brief second while he had been looking down at the body on the floor, the door had been closed and locked again.

Tinker turned and ran down the stairs, and as he arrived at the door of the room in which he had been waiting, he halted suddenly and dodged to one side.

Crack! Crack!

The sound of pistol-shots rang out, echoing in the house of death.

### The Face of the Murderer

**B**LAKE glanced quickly down the stairs, then raised his foot and kicked hard with the flat of it at the door near the lock.

He put all his weight and strength behind it, and the screws of the lock were torn out and the door crashed open inwards.

The bed-room was empty, and the moonlight through the gaping window showed everything in detail.

Jamieson's clothes lay about carelessly, and the bed was ruffled, but had not been slept in.

The detective crossed to the window and looked out. The shooting had stopped below, but it was clear that the murderer had got out of this window, had climbed down the wall, and entered the passage.

Blake turned and started for the bed-room door, then hesitated and changed his mind.

Tinker was already in the passage at the bottom of the stairs, and the murderer was probably still in the room below.

At all costs, the murderer would keep the sight of his face from him, or if he did that, he still would be in danger of holding to a alibi.

An alibi which would not free him entirely, but which would certainly cast some doubt on the issue that the man might easily get away with in a court of law.

Blake climbed out of the window and got his feet on the brick ledge. The brick joints of the wall were ancient and deep, giving a good finger-hold.

The detective climbed down the face of the wall, until he came level with the side of the window of the room below. He clung there, and craned his head to one side to look into the room.

Crack, crack!

Pieces of broken brick spurted away from the edge of the window opening close to Blake's head.

The detective just as the shadow of the man inside the room turned and ran towards the window.

Blake showed himself fully in the opening as he scrambled down over the sill into the room.

The murderer was in full sight now. He rushed out of the room, and two more pistol-shots rang out in the corridor as the murderer fired at Tinker.

Blake saw the fugitive run into the parlour and make for the cellar trapdoor. He vanished down the stairs.

"All right, Tinker?" he called in the darkness, his heart fluttering with dread.

Just about, guv'nor," came the breathless answer from the darkness beside the stairs.

"Thank Heaven!" Blake muttered, and made for the parlour doorway.

His natural anxiety for the fate of his young assistant was now his only loss a valuable second, and then another interruption came.



As he moved into the parlour doorway, Lucy came running blindly out of it, scared out of her wits by the firing. She bumped into the detective and flung her arms round his neck.

"Save me! Save me!" she screamed.

"All right! Let go!" Blake panted, trying to tear her arms from his neck.

But the girl clung with the strength of blind panic. For three seconds the detective could not break the desperate hold, and when at last he freed himself, the girl fell back against the wall, and began to sob wildly.

Blake dashed across the parlour, and grabbed up Lorrin's small pistol from the floor where it lay.

He turned towards the cellar trapdoor as a roar sounded from the depths of the cellar.

He reached the trapdoor and stared down. The cellar was filling with a foaming flood of water, and barrels and other articles were being tossed and thrown about on the eddying stream.

Blake clattered down the stairs, and shone his torch across the cellar. One part of the brick-and-mortar wall stood open like a door, and it was through this secret opening that the flood water was rushing.

The murderer was fighting his way along the tunnel beyond, spray bursting up all round him as the flood waves surged and splashed as high as his waist.

Blake levelled his gun, and took aim, but a flying cloud of spray burst up and entirely hid the figure of the murderer. He dropped the gun again.

Bullets might be precious. He could not afford to waste any now.

He plunged down into the swirling water which threatened to tear his legs from under him, and waded across the cellar towards the tunnel.

This ancient smugglers' tunnel was ages old. There was no doubt that the murderer had used it many times before—but not on this night.

The flood had cut it off as effectively as it had cut off the entire inn. It was only in a last desperate race to save his own life that the murderer had taken the hundred-to-one chance of being able to get away through it.

Tinker came splashing down into the cellar behind Blake. He shouted something, but his words were lost in the roar and splash of the angry flood which was slowly filling the cellar.

Blake entered the tunnel and fought his way along, sometimes clinging to the tunnel walls to save himself being flung down by the force of the currents that sucked at his legs.

Spray burst up everywhere, filling the tunnel with rain and cutting off the sight of the fugitive ahead.

Tinker followed after the detective as well as he could, though once or twice he was thrown down and plunged into the water before he could save himself.

They went on until gradually the level of the water began to sink. The floor of the tunnel was sloping upwards, and the volume of flood water which had been trapped in the cellar was dropping fast as it filled the cellar of the inn behind them.

It was no more than a foot deep when Blake saw the shadowy figure of the murderer running through a few inches of water ahead of him.

Blake raised his gun again, and once more hesitated to shoot.

"Why don't you shoot, guv'nor?" yelled Tinker from behind.

"We may need our bullets!" Blake snapped back, and began to move forward fast.

The water became shallower and shallower, until the detective found that he could sprint fast along the floor of the tunnel.

He gained upon the running man ahead. He saw the man's head turn quickly and glance back over his shoulder.

"Hilfe!" the runaway yelled. "Geheimpolitist! Detektiv!"

"German!" panted Blake. "He's warning somebody ahead. Thank Heaven I saved the bullets!"

The runner shouted again, warning somebody ahead that the detectives were pursuing him, and some confused answering shouts came, echoing strangely, as if ringing from inside a rock cavern.

Then the murderer reached the end of the tunnel and jumped down out of the detective's sight.

Blake slackened speed, and kept close to one wall as he approached the end of the tunnel. He



The door of the bedroom opened and as the detective bent forward a figure toppled out and crashed to the floor, a knife protruding from his back. It was the man Blake had thought was the killer—but it was now certain the killer was inside the room!

came near enough to see into a rock cavern beyond, then he stopped.

The cavern was large, and in the middle the rock floor had been broken away, and provided a secret anchorage for a boat, twenty feet wide, and sixty long.

The floor of the tunnel in which they stood was a few feet higher than the cavern floor, and in consequence the first wave of the flood only had thrown tons of water into this tunnel.

Once that had passed, the level had fallen again, and the surplus water had drained out of the cavern again, leaving the water-level in the secret dock several feet higher than normal. In this secret dock lay a long black craft of steel. At first it looked like a whale, but an open trapdoor in the top of it revealed its true nature.

"The monster," Blake muttered between his teeth. "A miniature submarine!"

Tinker came up behind his master and stopped, peering into the cavern.

"So that's what it was!" he breathed.

"Clever, isn't it?" Blake murmured. "It could be launched by a parent U-boat off Inverness, then sink its way in here to get all the information which our murderer was collecting for the benefit of the Nazis!"

Utter silence reigned in the cavern, but it was the silence of death. Somewhere the murderer and the crew of the tiny U-boat were hiding, their guns ready.

Blake searched the gloomy cave carefully, then made out a shoulder of rock jutting from the wall on the other side of the cave.

He saw something move slightly, then smiled grimly to himself and held his little pistol ready. The faint sound of the submarine could be heard, grating against the sides of its secret dock.

"Where are they?" Tinker breathed.

"Over there," Blake answered in a whisper. "Keep out of sight, Tinker, but keep making an odd noise or two in here — I'm going out."

"But you—" gasped Tinker.

"I can't afford to waste bullets," Blake reminded him simply. "I must have short range with a little gun like this."

He dropped to his hands and knees, keeping the gun ready for instant action, and began to slither forward along the floor of the tunnel on his stomach.

Foot by foot he came nearer the tunnel mouth until he was at the very edge of the short drop down to the ledge of the dock.

No sound came from across the cavern. The men were waiting for him, but they could not see him yet through the gloom, and the detective hoped they would be watching for the appearance of a man—not a shadow that moved silently across the face of the floor.

He hesitated at the brink of the drop, then slithered slowly over the edge and reached the

rock below. Still there was no sound from across the cavern.

Tinker made a shuffling noise in the tunnel, then was silent again. Blake crawled farther across the rock towards the edge of it, where it dropped down into the water.

He stopped as there came a sound of movement from the men behind the shoulder of rock. "Acht! Let's go for them!" said a guttural voice in German. "How many of them?"

"Two."

"Well, there are three of us," grunted the German.

"Thanks for the information," thought Blake, lying still in the shadows. "Now we know where we are!"

"That's just what they want us to do," came the answer to the German. "It's a trap. Don't move. Wait. Let them move first."

Silence fell as Tinker made another scraping sound in the tunnel. Blake crawled right up to the edge of the rock and stopped again.

Then suddenly from the tunnel Blake heard a gruff imitation of his own voice.

"We know where you are," he heard Tinker say. "What chance do you think you have of getting that boat out of here now?"

Blake slipped over the edge of the rock and down into the water, making no sound. He kept the gun above the surface, then silently began to swim across the water.

"Himmel!" came a voice from behind the shoulder of rock. "We had better go for them. They will shoot at the boat, and if that is put out of action—"

Blake reached the other side of the "secret dock," grasped the edge of the rock above him, and pulled himself slowly up. The faint noise of the submarine groaning against its moorings hid the sound of the water dripping from the detective's clothes.

He drew himself up on to the rock, and a faint smile spread over his face. He was immediately behind the three men hiding by the rock shoulder!

"You stand no chance now!" Tinker cried from the tunnel.

"No chance at all!" cut in Blake from behind them.

"Himmel!"

One man in German naval uniform sprang to his feet and whirled round, a heavy automatic pistol in his hand.

Crack!

Blake's small pistol spat viciously. The German threw up his hands and staggered. His gun clattered to the floor and he reeled backwards, over the edge of the dock, and vanished into the water with a noisy splash.

The other two men rose up slowly. The sudden appearance of the detective right behind them had been a stunning blow.

Tinker came running noisily from the



direction of the tunnel. He was unarmed, but the spies did not know that.

They found themselves menaced from front and rear, and they realised that the game was up. Both men dropped their guns and raised their hands above their heads.

One was in naval uniform, the other in a soiled and damp grey suit.

Tinker came up behind them.

"Deal with the naval officer, Tinker!" Blake snapped. "The other gentleman is my pigeon!"

Tinker grabbed the officer round the neck from behind and flung him to the ground. The man made no resistance while Tinker bound him up securely with his own belt.

Blake brought out his torch and pressed the switch, but the water had got into it. No light came.

"A pity," he said softly. "I wanted to see your face. I know exactly what it looks like, but I want Tinker to see."

"Sorry I can't oblige, Blake," said the captive sarcastically.

"So am I, Jamieson," Sexton Blake answered.

"Jamieson?" echoed Tinker blankly. "But Jamieson's dead! He was killed—"

"One Jamieson was," the detective answered smoothly. "But there were two of them."

"What?" gasped Tinker.

"Look out!" Blake snapped.

Jamieson turned suddenly and made a lightning effort to grab Tinker. The detective saw the move he intended to make. If he could get Tinker in front of him Blake would not be able to shoot.

Once more the little gun snapped.

Jamieson stopped with his hands still clenched out to grab Tinker. He stayed perfectly still, and in the shadows his face appeared to smile.

"So it is your match, after all," he said quietly.

"You win, Blake. But I win, too. You can never hang me now, you know."

He seemed to sway slightly, but remained with the strange grin still fixed upon the grey shadow of his face. Then his knees collapsed under him, and he pitched forward to the ground.

He rolled over and lay still. A silence followed.

"I still don't understand, gunvorn," Tinker said, bewildered.

"You should, Tinker," Blake answered. "You see, everyone had alibis for these murders, yet there was no place where a man, who was unknown to us, could have hidden."

For that reason the man didn't hide. We were seeing him all the time. That is—we were seeing one Jamieson or the other, but never the two together!"

Tinker frowned.

"Tom's murder is easily explained now," the detective went on. "This Jamieson got into the cellar by the tunnel while the other was establishing an alibi in the parlour. The murderer did his work hid in the tunnel again, then stole Tom's body back a short while after."

"Yes, I see that," Tinker said. "But after Tom's murder the tunnel became useless."

"Quite. We were shot at in our room," Blake said. "By this Jamieson, who went straight into the bath-room. The other was establishing an alibi in the bed-room with Gordon and Lorn."

"We went downstairs for a second, and when we came out this Jamieson emerged from the bath-room, knowing that his brother had established his alibi, and after he had done that, would get out of the bed-room window and hide on the ledge while the murderer got into his room."

"That was the idea. So long as they were never seen together, we could prove nothing whatever against them."

"Gosh! But it was clever!" gasped Tinker.

"The German Government no doubt paid them highly for their cleverness," Blake commented dryly. "You see, Jamieson could always be at the inn, whereas Jamieson was also free to move about and get all the information he wanted concerning our naval movements."

"So that's how a man can be in two places at once!" cried Tinker. "But you had a suspicion of it before?"

"I had a suspicion, but I did not get proof until Jamieson, the decoy duck, lost his nerve in the inn parlour," said Blake. "He knew the game was slumped up, and he was frightened. That's why he had to be killed, too."

"But I hit him to steady him up. The blow left a scar, then the lights went out and Lorn was shot."

"Jamieson, the murderer, came in to do that job, the decoy took his gun immediately afterwards, and they rushed out of the room together."

"One purposely bumped into me, and I went back into the room with him. The other was free to slip up to his room, taking the gun."

"But you know you were two of them then?" demanded Tinker.

"Not till the lights went on again," said Blake. "Then I saw the brute I had given him had miraculously vanished. I threatened him with Lorn's gun, but the brother's panic had got the better of him. He came back outside the door and made another attempt to get rid of us, which failed."

"Then I knew what the trick really was."

Tinker whistled and looked towards the cavern entrance where the faint gold light of a caving train tinged the water.

"It was a devilish idea, gunvorn," he said.

"It was. And Gordon was killed obviously, because he accidentally found out there were two Jamiesons. One was downstairs with us—as he knew—but he suddenly saw another one. So he died."

The detective brought out his sodden pipe.

"I would enjoy a quiet smoke," he said, with a tired grin. "We must get back to the inn and get a message through to the police."

He gazed at the secret submarine.

"And that's how the monster and the murders were connected up," he said. "Of course, anyone who saw this thing marking away from us knew what it was, and if they did guess—as MacLaren did—then he had to die."

He stepped off the dock on to the rounded steel top of the vessel, then clambered down through the small conning-tower into the interior. Tinker followed him, and for some time they examined the shining machinery and the controls.

"Entirely electric, Tinker," said Blake musingly. "Electric motors driven off batteries, consequently there would be hardly any sound."

"You can imagine this thing marking away from a parent U-boat, and stealing its way down the canal by Inverness into the lake here—"

"That is a periscope," said Tinker.

"No. A periscope would have given away the real nature of the 'monster.' The wake of a periscope would have branded it at once as a submarine, and its terrifying effect would have been negated."

"Don't forget, it had only to nose its way through shallow water till it got to the lake, and the course would be easily surmised by these electric depth motors. It was only in the deep waters of the lake that it had to surface to get a more accurate bearing."

He pointed his finger to a small steel disk on which lay the navigator's charts and a bundle of papers. Blake examined them quickly.

"There's the proof, Tinker!" he snapped.

"The information about our shipping movements collected by Jamieson and brought to this secret collecting-place to-night. If these papers had gone back to that U-boat, a thousand lives would have been the price of our failure!"

The detective clambered out of the submarine again.

He turned and made his way towards the tunnel. Tinker followed him until the detective stopped and frowned.

"I knew I'd forgotten something, Tinker," he said. "I've never seen the visitors' book, after all!"

THE END.

## THE BOOK THAT HELPS YOU TO UNDERSTAND THE WAR!



**THE MODERN ENCYCLOPEDIA**  
contains  
1,000 PAGES  
1,000,000 WORDS  
1,000,000 ILLUSTRATIONS  
17,000 MAPS  
MORE THAN 50,000 PHOTOGRAPHS  
IN ADDITION TO A SEPARATE  
**PRESENTATION 28-PAGE  
HANDY WAR ATLAS**  
Size 9 1/2" x 6 1/2", containing 20 detailed  
maps of the war zone in  
the European theatre. The  
book is bound in elegant cloth  
with gold tooling and is  
bound in the open in real gold and polished  
leather. It is a unique volume  
and will be the most useful  
reference work of the war.

## 4-1-1 VOLUME FOR 3/6

Sent direct To Your Home  
Together With WAR ATLAS

To understand fully everything about the  
war and all that is going on in the world  
today, the mine of information which  
THE MODERN ENCYCLOPEDIA  
and WORLD ATLAS provides is essential  
to everyone. It is the greatest one  
volume book of reference ever produced,  
comprehensive, complete and up-to-date.  
Telling, it is complete. It is clear—you  
find what you want in a flash. It is  
perfect accommodation to your  
newspaper.  
Each page measures 9 1/2" x 6". The World  
Atlas section and the Encyclopedia, which is  
quite distinct from the Handy War Atlas,  
contains about 60 maps of all countries, and  
consists of 32 pages printed on special paper.  
Edited by Sir JOHN HAMMERTON

To DETECTIVE WEEKLY Presentation Book Dept.,  
Tollis House, Tollis Street, London, E.C.4. (Comp.)

Please send me a copy of The Modern Encyclopedia  
together with Presentation 28 page WAR ATLAS  
1 enclosure P.O. value 3/6.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## The Hon. R. S. V. Parvale cuts up rusty in CROOK'S CARGO



The Hon. R. S. V. Parvale is not one to think  
of consequences, so that when he wanders into  
noisy Buenos Aires  
dive and discovers a  
Lancashire girl kept in the  
power of the disreputable  
manager. The Hon. R. S. V. Parvale  
and his satellites, however,  
do not mean to take that  
lying down and the resultant  
clash makes a tale of gripping  
entertainment.

**SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY**  
If your arrangement is sold out, ask him to  
order copies for you!

4d each

# From INFORMATION RECEIVED

A SUMMARY OF POLICE AND DETECTIVE NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS



## Missing

Mrs. Emily Cota had vanished. From her home in New Jersey, New England, Mrs. Cota had walked out one day and never been seen again. Her husband, Ramon Cota, could offer no explanation, and had already, it seemed, found consolation in a certain young brunette.

Curiously enough, police aid had not been sought by the husband, but by other relatives, and Detective William McManus, who was in charge of the case, thought this fact strange enough to justify more than normal attention in Ramon Cota's direction.

It was apparent to him that Mrs. Cota had private means, and his first move was to find out its source. Discreet inquiries revealed that before her marriage she had been employed by a firm known as Roebeling & Co., and that she was now in receipt of a pension from them.

McManus went to interview an official of the company and learned that a cheque had been forwarded to Mrs. Cota at her New Jersey home only two weeks before—and that it had been cashed a few days later. Yet Mrs. Cota had been missing for more than two months! How, then, could she have signed and cashed this cheque?

The cheque was produced, and the signature studied, yet despite the obvious suggestion that it had been forged, the signature was identical with ones known to be genuine. If, however, Mrs. Cota had endorsed the cheque, as would appear, how had the cheque come into her possession—when no one knew where she was?

## Highlights

The detective found that this mysterious cheque had been cashed at a wine shop, but the manager, when interviewed, could remember nothing of the person who cashed it—even if it had been a man or a woman. Nevertheless, McManus thought it strange that a woman of Mrs. Cota's position should choose such a shop to cash a cheque.

The more he thought about the highlights of this case the more he was convinced that Ramon Cota knew a lot more than he cared to admit. And not very far back in his mind was the thought that he had to contend not only with the mystery of a missing person, but a case of murder.

He probed into the relationship between Ramon Cota and his wife and into Cota's past, and he learned some very interesting things.

Mrs. Cota, whose single name had been Emily Reidel, was some years older than Ramon, and what affection there had been in the union—it had obviously been very much one-sided—and the fact that Cota's interest did not extend much further than his wife's cheque-book, was illustrated by a number of examples which came to light.

Before the wedding, it seemed, Mrs. Cota had paid for two expensive cars, which Cota had sold, under various excuses, and pocketed the cash. After the marriage he had several times disappeared with valuables belonging to his wife which had never returned home again; and on one occasion he took a number of bonds to the

value of some £500, but they proved to be not negotiable.

All this added up to a pretty suspicious total—especially when McManus was shown by Mrs. Cota's sister a letter written by the missing woman just two months before, in which she said everything was fine now with her marriage, and that they were not to be surprised if she didn't write again for some time, as she and her husband were planning to go away.

Right on top of this came the discovery that Cota had been married twice before, and that he had never been divorced from his second wife.

This was bigamy, and McManus' big chance. He had Cota arrested right away, and having made sure of him on the one charge, proceeded to gather in the ends of his main case.

The first of these ends which McManus selected were the cheque issued by the Roebeling Company and the letter received by Mrs. Cota's sister. These, with specimens of the missing woman's signature, he turned over to his hand-writing experts, who declared them to be forgeries.

## The Stone Cupboard

That satisfactorily fastened down those ends, and the detective decided that the remainder he could now gather in in one go.

With a strong escort, he marched Cota off to the New Jersey house where he and his wife had lived, and insisted on him being with him all the time he made a scrupulous search of the place. From attic to cellar the search went on without producing the slightest lead, until they reached a large stone cupboard beneath the front steps.

As before, McManus pushed Cota in front

of him, and watched him closely while he searched round. It was then he realized that Cota, who had been talking all the time, denying his guilt of any crime and airing his own views of the case, was now talking faster than ever. Words poured from his lips and, whereas up till now Cota's words had meant little or nothing to the detective, they suddenly took on a new meaning.

## Accusation

Into his mind flashed a story he had once read—a famous story by that genius of crime fiction, Edgar Allan Poe. He remembered the title, "The Tell-Tale Heart," and he remembered how a crazy murderer had stood on the spot beneath which was buried his victim and talked furiously to his questioners to drown the voice of his own conscience which whispered maddeningly, unceasingly, in his brain.

McManus looked at Cota narrowly, saw how he had edged to a corner of the cupboard, the cold light which had crept into his eyes. And in the figure of Cota as he stood there talking, he saw that dominating character of Poe's story.

McManus was satisfied. Jabbing an accusing finger at Cota, he accused him outright not only of the murder of his wife, but of standing right over the very place where he had buried the body.

Cota went deathly white. The flow of words stopped as if a tap had been turned off. For a moment he looked at the detective, stupefied. Then he nodded his head slowly.

They found the body beneath the very flagstone upon which.

The murderer was sentenced to the electric chair.

## TO ALL READERS OF SEXTON BLAKE...

### IMPORTANT NOTICE

*Because of paper shortage, due to the War, this is the last number of 'DETECTIVE WEEKLY'. The Editor stands all readers to their local support over a period of many years and would like to remind them that they can still follow the adventures of Sexton Blake, Tucker and Pedro in...*

**SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY**

*...Two long complete novels are published in the first Thursday of each month and the price of each volume is 6/6d.*

**SEND YOUR NEWSAGENT TO RESERVE YOUR COPIES. HIS SUPPLY IS STRICTLY LIMITED AND A REGULAR ORDER IS ESSENTIAL TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT.**

*—Your Editor*



### The Story So Far

**I**T is midnight. The Rev. Colgate Jones, Vicar of Claybury, in the Thames Valley, is about to retire, when he hears a sound at his front door. When he opens it a wounded man falls across the threshold. Before he dies, the man reveals himself as a Secret Service agent who has discovered a clue to Nazi activities in Britain. His last words are a warning: "Find X1 before the 21st. That's the date when they'll strike. X1 will give the signal. Toothpaste—that's the sig—"

Colgate-Jones telephones his friend Michael Dene, of the Foreign Office, who reveals to Colgate-Jones and his niece, Carol Wray, that the dead man was named Clavering. In his pocket they find a menu card taken from a restaurant known as "The Flaming Dawn."

Dene visits this place, in company with Colgate-Jones, Carol, and Frank Stacey, another Secret Service man. There they meet Janice Gould, a girl-friend of the dead Clavering, from whom she has received a sealed letter. While she has gone to get it from her coat, all the lights are extinguished. Dene and his friends are overpowered in the darkness and taken by car to a house in the country.

(Now read on)

### "I Am X1!"

**T**HE door of the car was jerked open, and they saw that it was still dark outside. Several men came forward, and they were lifted out and carried up a short flight of steps and through a wide door into a dimly lighted hall. Dene caught a glimpse of rugs and old furniture as he was borne swiftly up a huge staircase, along a corridor, and deposited on the floor of a big, empty room, lit by a single bulb that hung from the centre of the high ceiling.

The other three were brought in, and their captors, who had performed their task in complete silence, withdrew and locked the door.

Not very comfortable quarters, are they? remarked Colgate-Jones, looking about. "I wonder where we are?"

"Somewhere in the country, I think," murmured Carol. "I saw a lot of trees—"

"It doesn't matter very much where we are," broke in Dene, "the most important thing is, how can we get away? Try your bonds. Perhaps you can loosen 'em."

They tried, but after a few minutes each had to confess that they could make no impression. The cords that bound them had been tied by experts.

"Nothing doing?" asked Dene breathlessly. "I'm afraid it's the same here. Well, we seem to have got into a nasty lump."

He stopped suddenly as there came the sound of footsteps outside the door. The key rattled in the lock, the door opened, and a man came quietly into the room.

He was of medium height, and the thick over-

coat he wore increased his bulk. Beneath the soft-brimmed hat, a mask of black silk covered his face.

"Good-morning," he said in a low voice that was completely toneless.

"Who are you?" demanded Michael Dene, and the newcomer uttered a little throaty chuckle that for some reason made the Secret Service man's flesh crawl.

"A good many people would like to know that, Mr. Dene," he answered gently. "A great many people. But none of them ever will. I am nobody—a cipher and a number. I am known as X1."

"So you're X1, are you?" said Michael Dene. "I've been wanting to meet you."

"You should be thankful, then, that your wish has at last been granted, Mr. Dene," replied X1. "I'm afraid, however, that you won't."

"What do you intend to do with us?" demanded Dene.

Again the soft chuckle came from behind the silver mask.

"You will have to die, I'm afraid. I haven't yet worked out the details. It is rather a problem, for your deaths must have the appearance of having been natural. I shall, no doubt, hit on a scheme eventually. Luckily, there is no immediate hurry. How much do you know?"

"Very little," answered Dene.

"I thought you couldn't know much," said X1. "According to my information, Clavering could not have lived long enough to have imparted much. Tell me what you know."

Dene considered quickly. There was nothing to be gained by withholding what information he had. Unless they could discover some means of escape they would die, anyway. On the other hand, he had been studying this man's mentality, and he had decided that, like the rest of the leading Nazis, he was as vain as a peacock. It was just possible that with skilful handling he would reveal the whole scheme, from the sheer love of displaying his own cleverness, which would be of inestimable value if they succeeded in getting away. Rather to the surprise of Colgate-Jones and the others, therefore, Dene rapidly related what they knew.

"Hm!" commented X1 when he finished. "It's rather more than I thought, and yet really very little—"

"I'm still under the impression that Clavering was exaggerating," interrupted Michael Dene unthinkingly. "It is unlikely that anything you and your bunch of spies could do would have the effect of such wholesale destruction as he hinted—"

"You think so?" said the other quickly. "You are mistaken, Mr. Dene. If anything, Clavering underestimated the result. The signal which I shall give will set in motion a chain of destruction that will prove the decisive factor in this conflict."

"What exactly is supposed to happen?"

"The sign of X1 glittered through the narrow slits of his mask.

"The downfall of Great Britain," he said, and

for the first time there was a tinge of emotion in his colourless voice.

"I refuse gathered that that was the intention," said Dene impatiently. "but how do you intend to bring it about?"

"By a blow which will paralyse trade, stop all armament manufacture, cut off supplies, cause a panic throughout the country," answered X1. "The blow, to be successful, must be struck from inside. It must come when it is least expected, and it must be of shattering dimensions. That is the modern way of making war. The scheme, which we have so patiently perfected, will achieve just that. It will be put into practice simultaneously in every town and city throughout the British Isles."

"What is going to happen, exactly?" inquired Dene anxiously.

"You have seen the work of a few extremists—their puny efforts with a few childish bombs?" said X1. "Magnify that ten thousandfold. Imagine every factory, food storage, railway station, suffering a crippling explosion; imagine these explosions taking place at exactly the same moment all over the country; imagine the railways put out of action, munition stores blown up, food rendered unfit for consumption. That is what is going to happen!"

"You're mad!" said Dene. "It's impossible!"

"It is not impossible," boasted X1. "It is not only possible, but practical. If you were alive—which you will not be—you would see it happen. The whole thing is prepared—everything is ready. The map of the British Isles has been divided into seven sections, and each of these sections is the target of a section-bomb. These men have worked indefatigably to bring about the result I have outlined. Carefully they have sought out the fanatics, the people with causes, and exploited them. The scheme is Nazi Germany's, but it will be carried out by your own countrymen. That is genius—to use the material at hand and mould it to suit your own purpose. These poor fools have no idea that they will be working for Germany. They think that they are furthering the interest of their own particular little cause. From these people our agents have worked for years, insidiously, cleverly, fostering their grievances and suggesting methods to redress them. It has taken a long time, but it is finished. The powder barrel has been set in position, the fuse is laid, it only needs my signal to set it alight."

And you really think that this will bring Britain to her knees?" demanded Dene. "How do you propose to give your signal so that it reaches all your agents simultaneously?"

"That," Mr. Dene replied X1, "must remain my secret. I have told you much, in order to prove to you that Clavering was not exaggerating—you cannot expect me to tell you everything."

"I will tell you one other thing," he said, pausing on the threshold. "The original date was, as you know, the twenty-first. It has been put forward, and will give the signal on Tuesday, the seventeenth, instead."

He went out, shutting and locking the door behind him.

### Hold Captive

**T**HERE was silence in the bare, dimly lit room when X1 had gone—a silence lasted for five minutes, a mile away a mine was broken by a long, sighing breath from Stacey.

"What a diabolical scheme!" he whispered. "I don't think it would have the crushing effect they imagine, but—"

"Why have they altered the date, I wonder?"



muttered Colgate-Jones. "Why have they put it forward?"

"To prevent the possibility of there being any hitch," said the Secret Service man. "They're afraid that somebody else may get wind of the scheme and put a stop to it. The discovery that we know anything about it has frightened them. Before that, they thought they succeeded without anybody being the wiser. Now they're not going to take any risks."

"We must stop it somehow," said Stacey. "Based on," murmured Dene, "Tuesday and today's Sunday. Even if we were free, what could we do? We don't know how this signal is to be given."

"Something to do with toothpaste," put in Carol. "If only we could have got that letter which Mr. Clavering gave to Janice Gould—"

"I'm afraid we shall never see that," said Michael Dene, "or the girl, either. They got her, without a doubt, and the letter, too."

"If we could only get free," grunted the vicar, "there's surely something—"

He broke off as the key rattled in the lock again, and the door opened to admit a large, brawny man, whose battered face and bull-neck suggested that he might have once been a prizefighter.

"I've come to keep you company," he said, shutting the door behind him and walking over to a chair. "X1 thought you might be up to some tricks. If any tricks like this was in yer mind, I'd think twice about it, if I was you."

He seated himself on the chair, and polling a big automatic from his pocket, balanced it on his knee. Dene eyed him with a sinking heart. It had occurred to him that they might be able to assist each other in getting free of the cords, but all hope of this was put to an end by the presence of the gaoler.

"Where are we?" he asked, after a time. "Somewhere in England," retorted the man with a grin. "I ain't giving away official secrets."

"You look like an Englishman," said the Secret Service man, looking at him steadily.

"Never you mind what I am," smiled the big man, the smile suddenly vanishing from his face. "England ain't never done anything for me, an' money's money, wherever it come from. Just you shut yer trap, dier heart?"

"I hear," replied Dene quietly, and relapsed into silence.

With eyes closed, he forced his tired brain to work. But not even the germ of a reasonable idea could he conjure up, and he was still thinking when, without realising the moment of transition, he fell asleep.

He awoke suddenly to the sound of a noisy clamour that appeared to come from the lower part of the house. Voices were raised in high altercation, and as he blinked himself to wakefulness, there was a shout and a scream of pain.

The brawny man in the chair uttered an oath, dropped the paper he had been reading, and springing to his feet, strode over to the door. As he unlocked it and hurried out into the passage, a fusillade of shots came from below.

"That in the world is happening?" muttered Colgate-Jones, staring at the door.

Dene shook his head. He must have been asleep for some time, for daylight was streaming in through the cracks in the shutter that covered the window.

"Goodness knows," he answered. "Perhaps they're having a row among the missives—"

The noise continued, and then above the hubbub they heard the sound of a hurried footstep in the corridor outside, and a bedraggled figure appeared in the open doorway.

Carol uttered a gasp. The newcomer was Janice Gould!

The dark girl was still in the dress she had worn at the Flaming Dawn—or what was left of it, for the flimsy material was torn and covered with mud and dirt. Her hair was heavily, and there was a streak of blood across her white face. She was breathing deeply, but her big eyes lighted with relief when she saw them.

"Oh!" she panted, pressing a hand to her heaving breast. "Oh, I'm so glad—I was afraid I should never be home again."

"There should be a penknife in my pocket, Miss Gould," broke in Dene quietly. "Could you find it and cut these cords?"

She nodded, and stumbled over to him. Fumbling in his pocket, she found the knife, and

in a few seconds he was free. Taking the knife from her hand, he went over to the others and slashed through their bonds. The racket downstairs had slightly subsided, as they rose stiffly to their feet.

"What's going on?" asked Stacey. "How did you get here?"

She was recovering her breath, and when she answered him it was less jerkily.

"The police are downstairs," she said. "I brought them—"

"The police!" ejaculated Dene, and again she nodded.

"Yes," she said. "When I went to get that letter from my coat, I overheard two men planning to—to put out the lights and kidnap you. They didn't see me—there's a bend in the passage—"

"I know," said Dene, as she paused.

"I wanted to hear more," she went on, "because I knew that they must be some of the men who had—had killed Jim. I hid behind a chair in the vestibule—I couldn't go on or I should have passed them—and I heard the whole plan. When the lights went out they were going to seize you four, take you to a room behind the band platform, drug you, and take you to some place, the name of which I didn't catch. I was coming back to warn you, when the lights went out, and I realised that there wouldn't be time. In the darkness I slipped out of the place, just as I was, and waited round the back. I

"You couldn't very well blame us, miss," broke in a deep voice behind her. "It did sound a bit far-fetched, and you looked a bit queer, too, if you'd forgive me saying so; only half-dressed like, an' covered with mud—"

"Miss Gould's intervention probably saved our lives," interrupted Dene. "Have you pulled in the people downstairs?"

The police-inspector nodded.

"Yes," he answered, "an' a nice bunch they are, seemingly. Two o' my men have been wounded. What's it all about? The young lady was talkin' about Nazis—"

Dene took him aside, produced his identity papers, and gave a brief history of the business, to the inspector's growing amazement.

"How many were in the house?" he concluded.

"Four," replied the man, "an' all armed. My sergeant's got 'em safe now."

"I'd like to have a look at 'em," said Dene, and turned to the others. "Wait here, will you?"

"I'm going to find a bath-room," said Carol decisively.

Michael Dene smiled and followed the inspector down the stairs. The four men who had occupied the house were sitting sullenly in the dining-room, handcuffed, and under the guard of a constable and a sergeant. As the Secret Service man had suspected, X1 was not amongst them.



Dene thrust the astonished clerk through the door, and an automatic appeared in his hand. "The game's up!" he announced tersely.

guessed they wouldn't leave by the front. It was bitterly cold, and I was nearly frozen, before anything happened. Then I saw two men come out the side door and carry something over to a big car that was standing close by."

"That must have been one of us," put in Dene.

"That's what I thought," said the girl, "but I couldn't see very well in the black-out. The big car drove off with the two men up in front, and I didn't know what to do. The lights were on again in the building, and the band was playing. But I didn't want to go back. And then I had an inspiration. There were several cars parked in front of the place, and I took the nearest, an open sports car, and followed the tail lamp of the other."

"That was smart," said Frank Stacey, eyeing her with admiration.

"I seemed to have been driving for hours," she continued, giving him a faint smile, "before the car I was following turned into a drive, and I realised that it had reached its destination, wherever it might be. I stopped outside, and eventually decided to go to the police."

"A very sensible decision," commented Michael Dene.

"I've never had so much trouble in all my life," the girl answered ruefully. "The nearest police station is in Oxford—this is a little village about four miles outside, called Syche—and it took me hours to find out where I was, or anything at all in the black-out, with everybody in bed and asleep. At last when I did reach the police station, they wouldn't believe the story I

He questioned them all closely, but it was soon evident that they knew practically nothing. They were merely employees, and although they had been aware of the nature of their employers, they were ignorant of the plot.

Dene waited very little time with them, but turned his attention to a search of the house. It was well furnished, and, as he discovered later, had been rented furnished, but there was nothing of the slightest interest anywhere.

Disappointed, he rejoined the others upstairs.

"What's the next move?" asked Colgate-Jones. "I ought to be getting back to the vicarage—"

"We'll all go back to the vicarage," said Dene, and there was a frown on his face.

"We've got to do some quick thinking. At the moment we are practically where we started. We neither know the identity of X1 nor the means by which he is going to give his signal, and we've got to find out one or both before to-morrow!"

## Light Breaks Through

MICHAEL DENE paced restlessly up and down the study at the vicarage, his hands clasped behind his back, and his brows drawn together. His face was pale and haggard, and there were marks under his eyes that testified to lack of sleep and worry. It was Monday morning.

Colgate-Jones, Carol, Frank Stacey, and Janice Gould, the latter wearing a costume of Carol's, were grouped round the fire, silent staring at the leaping flames, each, like Dene, trying to

